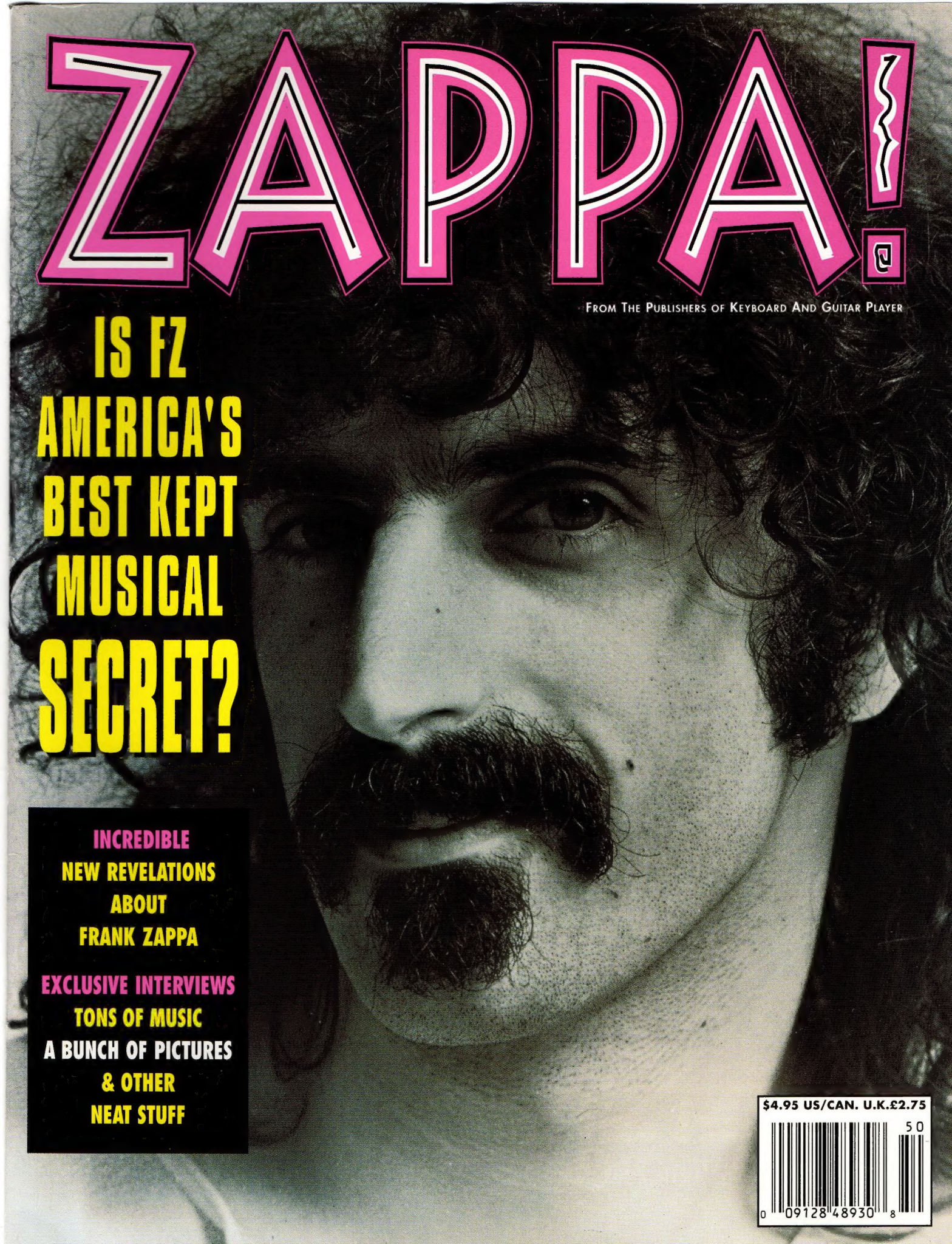
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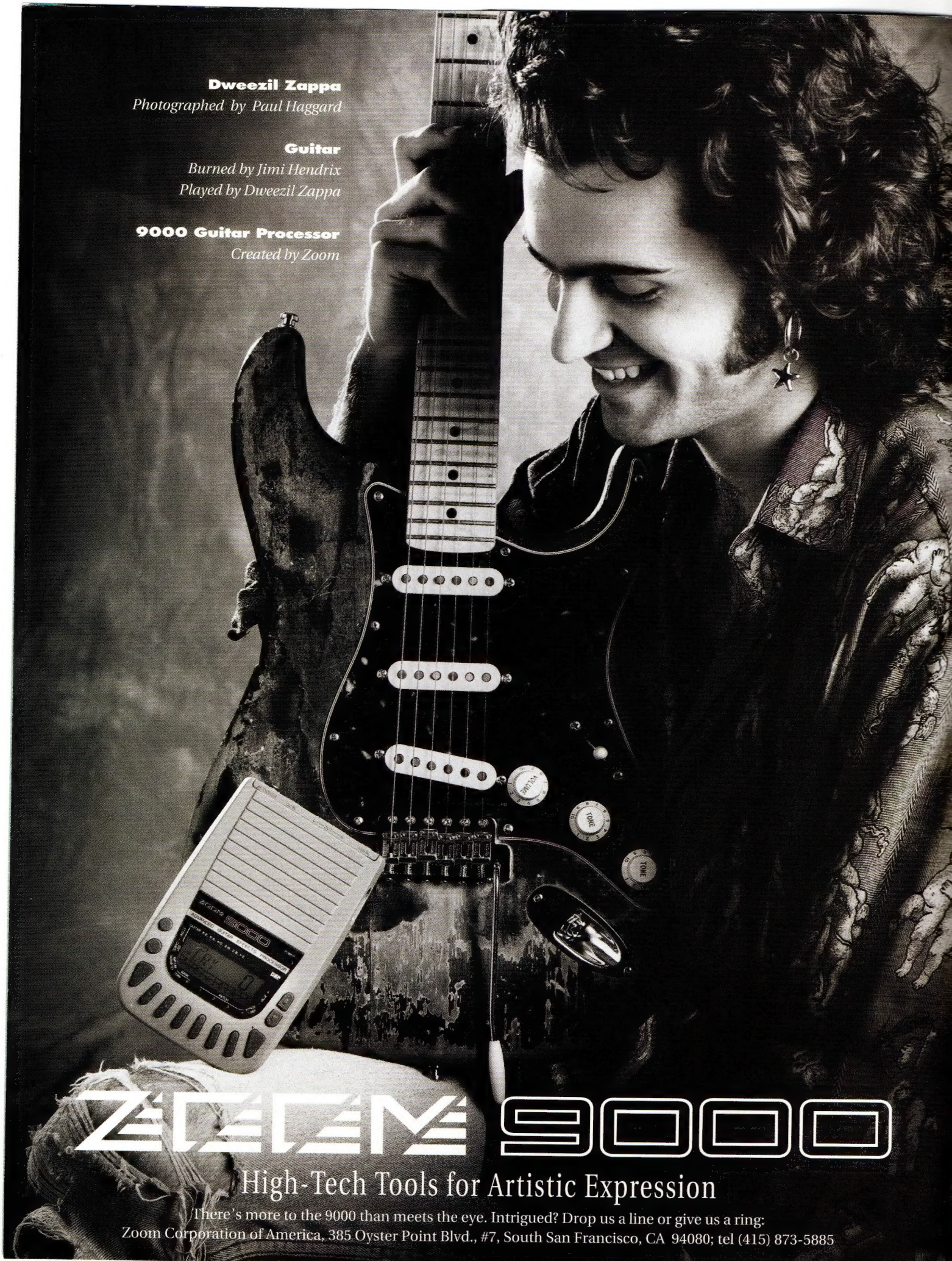
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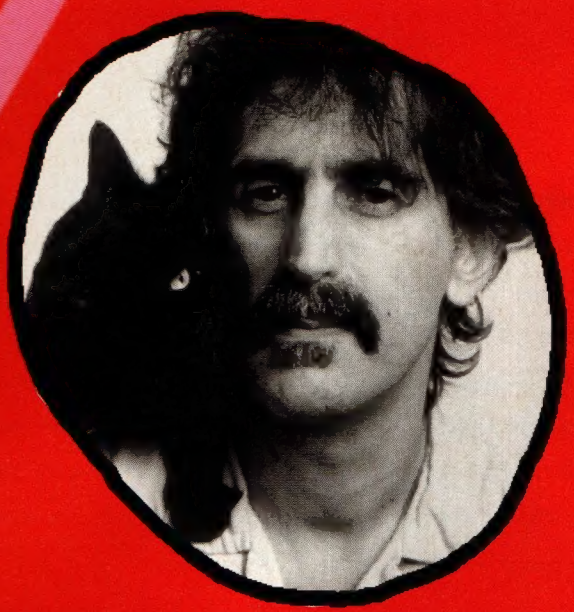

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FRANK ZAPPA!

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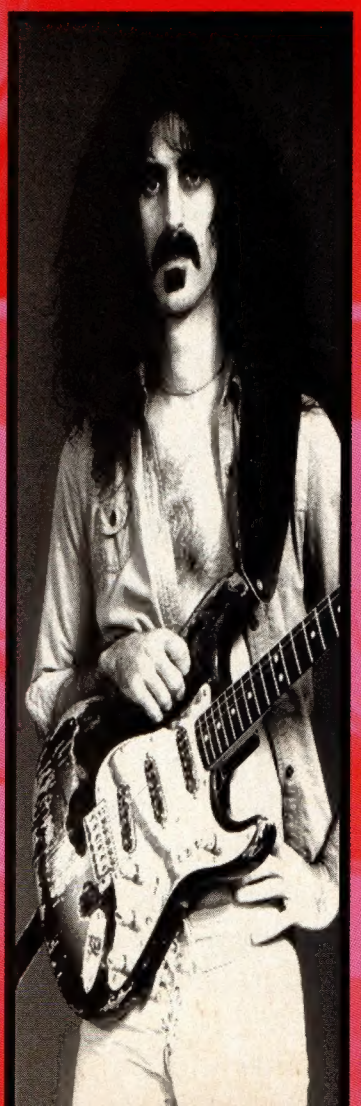

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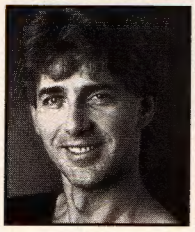

FROM THE EDITOR

GREAT ARTISTS ARE revolutions. Their names and works outlive those of monarchs, bosses, sheiks, wardens, princes, presidents, potentates, big wigs, and all those other guys. Great artists overturn tables, flip off traditions, upset the apple cart, moon the hallowed, screw up traffic signals, shine a glaring light on the emperor's naked butt. That's what they *better* do, anyway — that's what they're paid to do....Well, maybe not *paid*....Well, okay, generally *not* paid. They live the curse of their own insight; die in poverty, prison, or worse. They pays they's price for they's heresies.

What's happened to one who thinks humor belongs in music? Now *there's* a revolutionary notion — and it's all Frank Zappa's. Not musical puns — they abound. They bore. Guffaws, the man demands, not just dainty little titters from a brown-noser like Mozart. Big old Homer Simpson snortles watching Ren and Stimpy in a drunken snot-farting contest. What Zappa suggests is enough to make your hair stand on end: that it's okay to be human, since you are what you is. Utterly revolutionary. From any Zappa angle, we're all pretty funny. He says: "The real question is: Is it possible to laugh while fucking?"

What's happened to one who thinks humor belongs in music? In or out of vogue, on or off the air, he has continued to compose works of increasing quality and enormous volume. His orchestral output improves exponentially with each hour he spends on it, encapsulated in his Laurel Canyon home, surrounded by a loving family, supported by a loyal staff who feel, as one says, that their job is to "roll out the red carpet so that he can just walk without looking at his feet, remove the obstacles before he reaches them."

Little has been heard from Frank since the end of his *Broadway the Hard Way* tour of 1988. That he had been battling cancer of the prostate made big, stupid, intrusive, insulting headlines but missed the entire point that Zappa's relentless genius has continued to be exercised as it always has been: unglamorously, by his simply applying the seat of his pants to the top of a chair and slogging away at it, 16 hours a day, seven days a week, month in, month out, well or ill, noticed or not; and he has put out half a dozen albums since that last tour. "Gruelling," his wife Gail says, "Frank likes gruelling."

Like Spain's Gaudí who came to live in his never-finished cathedral, like Italy's Michaelangelo who shrank two inches during the years he agonized in the Sistine Chapel, Frank Zappa — funny guy, serious guy, public guy — had vanished into a black hole of staggering creativity where the energy emitted was experienced only by the few who were pulled down into that vortex because they lived with him, worked with him, or were honored to be taken for the whirl down into his Basement. That's where his recent art is experienced best. No home listening system exists that can yet reproduce the six-channel masterpieces Zappa has been churning out of his Synclavier from a quarter-century of audio archive.

Long since blacklisted from radio play, an outspoken ridiculer of MTV, branded the devil and stickered by worried mommies and daddies, even banished from record bins in the great state of Washington, he shrugged and focused his attentions on the addition of new technology and new people into his musical life, which has opened up a new era for the endlessly prolific Mr. Zappa. (His Synclavier shows at least 500 works-in-progress, but who's counting? That's just this week.) And anyway, fortuitously, simultaneously, the honor of a composer's lifetime was bestowed upon him: a year-and-a-half ago, he was chosen to be one of four featured composers for Germany's acclaimed Frankfurt Festival of 1992. What other rock and roll star could even *buy* such an honor? Frank had been singled out with three legends of this century's classical world: Karlheinz Stockhausen of Germany, Alexander Knaifel of Russia, and the late John Cage of the United States. Zappa had been afforded the opportunity to premiere whatever he wanted

for an entire week of concerts devoted exclusively to his music in Frankfurt at the Alte Opera, to be followed by performances in the Berlin Philharmonie and the Vienna Konzerthaus.

For over a year, he prepared for this historic event, creating not just new "dots on paper," but new technologies as well, in particular a six-channel, surround-sound system to create an experience for the audiences that holds no metaphorical equivalents, though it feels more shocking aurally than it would feel visually to a movie goer who'd last seen a black-and-white silent film to suddenly walk in on Cinerama. Teamed with the world's preeminent orchestra for 20th century music, The Ensemble Modern, Zappa has, in effect, a new "band," the first group he's ever worked with that can not only play, but also play to his *liking*, his most difficult Synclavier orchestrations, now rearranged for human performance. Selection titles such as "Food Gathering in Post-Industrial America," "Welcome to the United States," and "Chunnel Mr. Boogins" contain seamlessly reedited dialog snippets from as far back as the late Sixties, as controlled as recent recordings by the Ensemble's visit in July 1991 to Zappa's studio, as recent as televised political pomposities from the Los Angeles riots of 1992.

In addition, he has also completed disc one of *Civilization: Phaze III*, a haunting work about the end of the world, where artists have sought refuge in a large grand piano.

As if all this is not enough, Zappa has also completed a work which began more than a decade ago, a Synclavier piece of unparalleled complexity and beauty. *N-Light*, by its present name, is a 24-minute sonic masterpiece of orchestration and 6-channel mixing made possible by the convergence of Zappa's brilliance with technological breakthroughs which gave him the computer memory (in gigibytes) he needed to even load and *hear* the sections he'd written, plus a new editing capability that made possible crossfades of virtually infinite duration. In this piece, and others on the menu, mixing has reached a new level with Zappa's latest magic, where he can without detection change such sounds as an elephant's trumpeting into a harpsichord's trill and then into rain drops dripping in pitches around and through and behind the listener's head. The lucky few who've heard *N-Light* are generally left speechless after the hearing.

So that's where Frank's been. That's what Frank's been up to. That's what this issue is about. The most important composer to come out of modern popular music. And the funniest ever.

DON MENN

ZAPPA!

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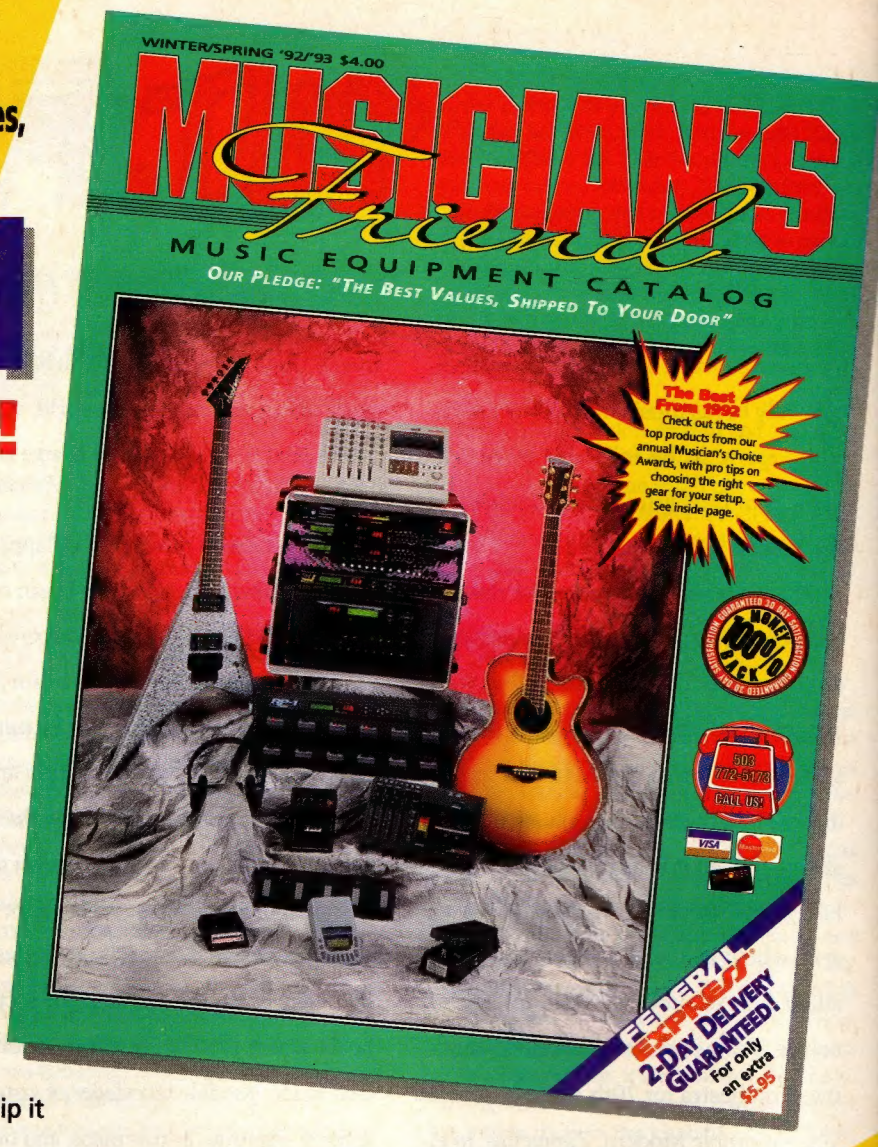
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Insight From Stuffed Shirts, Tight Collars, Young Guns, and One Hot Ratt

WHO CARES ABOUT FRANK ZAPPA? HOW IRRELEVANT CAN HE GET?

Does he/should he really have an impact? He's four years off the road. He's not an MTV star. With marshmallows at fingertips where awesome callouses once ballooned, he pretends he can no longer play guitar. This is like a soap opera: Can an ex-Hot Ratt like Warren De Martini really like the same dude as ex-Czech President Vaclav Havel, who boogied to *Bongo Fury*? Film star Beverly D'Angelo worries that Frank is trivialized, as if they'd called Leonardo da Vinci a stand-up comedian. *The Simpsons'* creator, Matt Groening, calls Zappa his Elvis. Even Zappa's kids like the guy. He's hard to rebel from. Is this all just a comic book? Here's what some of these people have to say. Young and old, musician and not, related by blood or baton. ➤ ➤ ➤

By Don Menn

NICOLAS SLONIMSKY

KENT NAGANO

ANDREAS MÖLICH-ZEBHAUSER

WARREN DE MARTINI

AYNSLEY DUNBAR

MOON UNIT, DWEEZIL, AHMET & DIVA

MATT GROENING

Nicolas Slonimsky

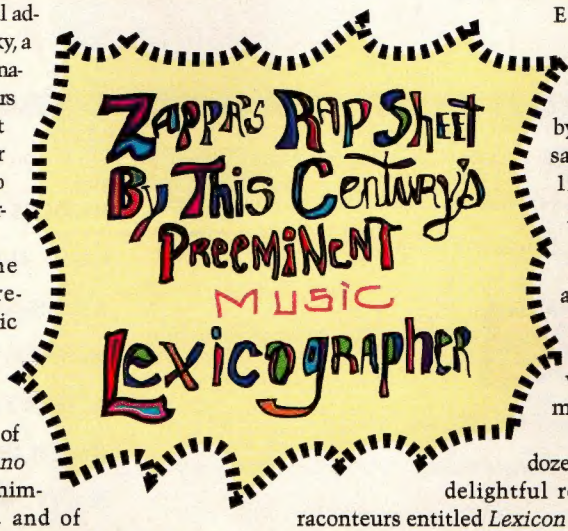
FRANK ZAPPA IS KNOWN FOR SHOWCASING UNDISCOVERED TALENT.

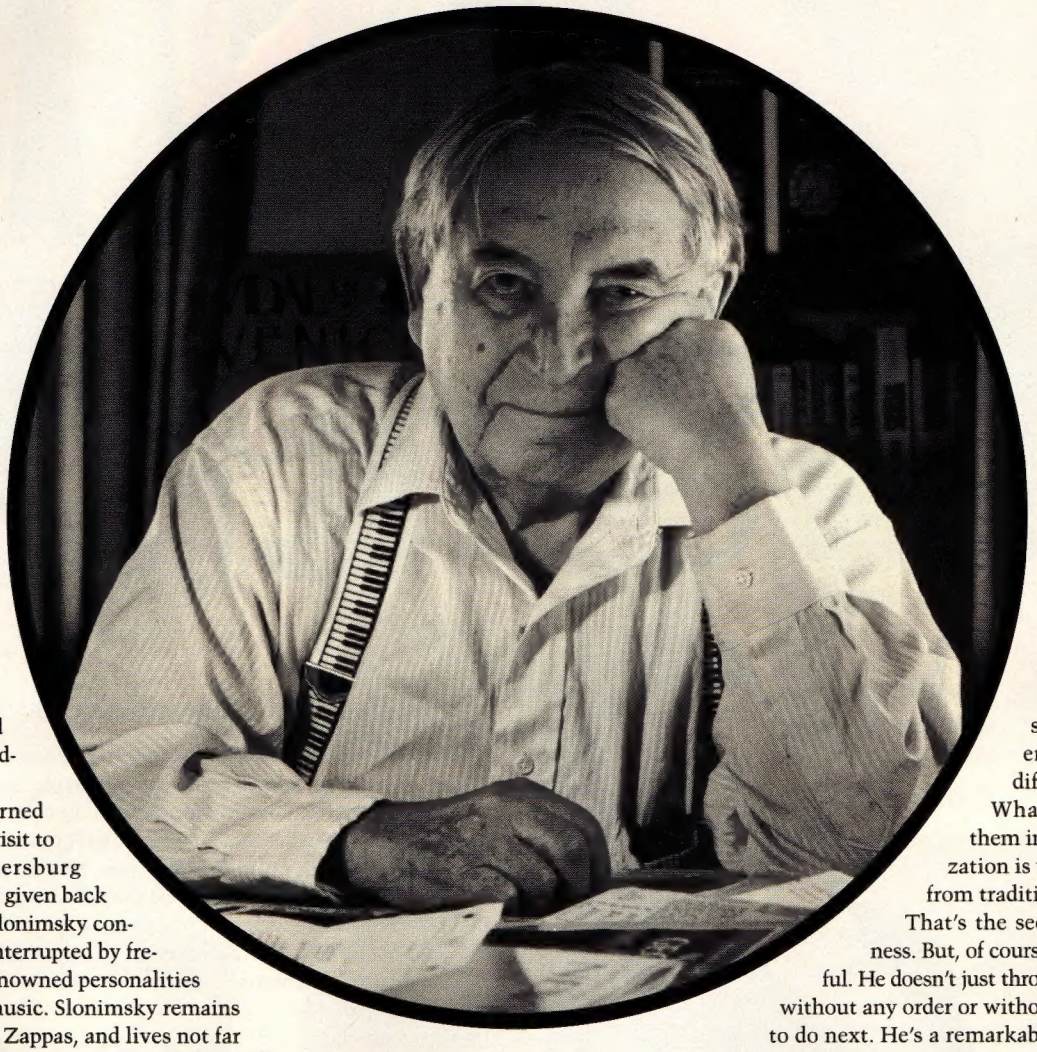
But at his birthday concert at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium on December 21, 1981, he brought before his rock audience, an octagenerian keyboard soloist, a pillar of musical adventure, Nicolas Slonimsky, a man he introduced as "our national treasure." Now 98 years old, Slonimsky is the eldest classical musical giant of our time. His contributions to music cross an astounding array of disciplines.

As a conductor, he oversaw the world premieres of the symphonic works of Charles Ives (America's most important composer of the first half of the century), of Béla Bartók's *First Piano Concerto* (with Bartók himself at the keyboard), and of Edgard Varese's "Ionisations" (with Varese himself cranking the sirens).

As a media personality, Slonimsky has delighted and outraged audiences with his unusual skills and musical heresies, with his brilliance and humor: by playing Chopin's "'Black Key' Etude" on the piano with an orange on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, by winning tens of thousands of dollars in the 1950s on *The Big Surprise*, by recording disjunctive pieces containing television laxative and toothpaste commercials with Rachmaninoff-flavored accompaniments.

He has written half a dozen books, including the delightful resource for musical raconteurs entitled *Lexicon of Musical Invective*, as well as edited and updated three editions of the definitive 2,500-page *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, which has more than 13,000 en-





tries. He invented new chords in his *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*, the work that inspired Zappa to telephone him and establish their friendship.

Having just returned from an April 1992 visit to his native St. Petersburg (Leningrad, recently given back its original name), Slonimsky continues his studies, interrupted by frequent visits from renowned personalities from all worlds of music. Slonimsky remains a close friend of the Zappas, and lives not far from them with a roommate, a cat whose name, Grody-to-the-Max, was inspired by Frank's elder daughter Moon.

▲ ✻ ▲ ✻

Frank Zappa called me because he knew my book, *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*. You see, this book is sort of a best-seller. Jazz players pick it up. It's a fifty-dollar book, so not everyone can afford it. Frank said he knew about this book, but he didn't realize I was in Los Angeles, and he wanted to meet me. And so we became friends. That was eight or nine years ago.

Frank immediately engaged me to play the Synclavier with him. He said, "Would you play with me, be my soloist?" I said, "When is your concert?" He said, "Tomorrow." I said, "What do we do?" And so we rehearsed, and I said to myself, "What can I lose?" Nowadays I will accept anything. If someone says, "Do you want to appear in a group of elephants?" I will say, "It's all right, I'll play with the elephants." I always ask myself, "What can I lose?"

The concert was a great success. Usually I have just a hundred or two hundred people, but this was a huge audience, and they shouted and everything! Afterwards, I maintained a friendship with Frank, and I went to his house several times. I tried out his equipment, and I was very impressed. I played his big piano with the extra octave — the Bösendorfer. He is a great man. I am very proud of his friendship. I don't see him often now because I don't drive.

There will be a new millennium eight years from now. I admire everything Frank does, because he practically created the new musical millennium. He does beautiful, beautiful work; he has beautiful ideas. It has been my luck to have lived to see the emergence of this totally new type of music which a hundred years ago didn't exist, a music created out of the recombination of dissonances between two tones, which are intervals, and a variety of separate tonalities which are combined in various ways — that's the best definition I can give. It doesn't contain quarter-tones or small intervals. Zappa sticks to 12 different notes and 11 different intervals. What he *does* with them in terms of organization is what is so far, far from traditional approaches. That's the secret of his greatness. But, of course, he is very careful. He doesn't just throw things together without any order or without a plan of what to do next. He's a remarkable man.

He's somebody who is completely new and completely different. Zappa sticks to the classical type of music. He is a classicist and a constructionist. And yet, why should he have to know formal harmony or counterpoint? Webern never finished a counterpoint book. Zappa would stand on good footing with Schoenberg, because Schoenberg never departed from his scale of 12 tones and 11 different intervals, whereas Webern and Stockhausen completely discarded such things and made the world of music just sound completely different and practically as unrecognizable as Chinese music. But Zappa puts musical sounds together and creates something new but not destructive of scales or intervals.

He is a remarkable man, and I think that he will make a decided triumph towards new harmony and new counterpoint and new intervallic construction and everything that is new, while still keeping the old components of notes, intervals, and harmonies. He can do anything now, and with his technology there is no limit to what he can achieve. **Z**

KENT NAGANO!

CONDUCTOR OF ORCHESTRAS IN THREE countries, Kent Nagano began his professional career with the Berkeley Symphony, a small group which — under his baton — acquired world recognition for bold programming of 20th Century music in front of audiences accustomed to Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven. From his earliest student days, Nagano had a great interest in Frank Zappa, and in 1981 played an important role by conducting the premieres of some of Zappa's "serious music" with the London Symphony Orchestra. Though earlier performances of Zappa's orchestral music had occurred two decades before at Frank's expense and in the '70s under the conductorship of Zubin Mehta, the Nagano/Zappa collaboration brought wider recognition to Zappa as a world-class composer and can be heard on two CDs (see discography on page 94). Nagano's present positions include music director of the Opéra de Lyon in France, associate principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, and music director of the Halle Orchestra in Manchester, England. When time allows, he accepts freelance assignments with the Ojai Music Festival, the Boston Pops, the Paris Opera, and the San Francisco Symphony, as well as the Berkeley Symphony where he began. He recently signed a five-year, 15-record contract with Erato.

PREMIERING ZAPPA WITH THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Photo: Rory Carnegie

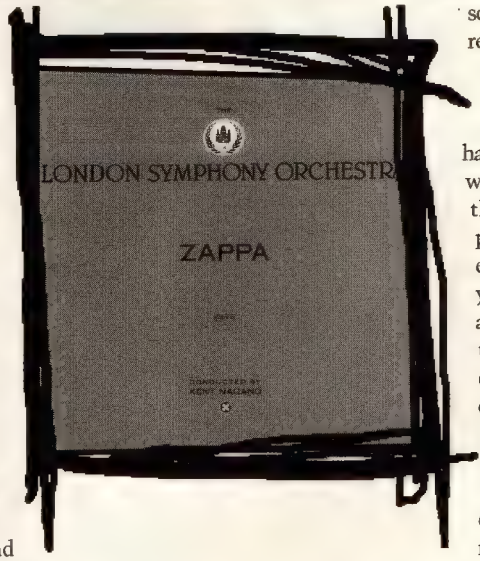
* * * *

I remember being very young and seeing Frank on *Johnny Carson* conducting the Mothers Of Invention. His attire and appearance left quite an impression on me. But I wasn't really that familiar with him as a musician until around 1967 when some older friends introduced me to his music. Years later, I was in Paris at IRCAM, which is run by Pierre Boulez, and what really stuck out on the project list was Frank Zappa's name involved in a concert and recording [*The Perfect Stranger*]. I was so surprised that he was not only an icon of popular and rock music, but also had captured the interest of such people as Boulez and the Ensemble Intercontemporain. So when I came back to California, I contacted — among other people — Don Menn and asked how I could get in touch with Frank, because I wanted to see his music myself. I was put in touch with his office, which informed me that he would be visiting my area shortly on tour, and if I was really interested they would send me up some scores. The scores never came, but Frank did. He phoned to introduce himself and explain that he'd heard I was interested in his music. He had some scores with him, which he would be happy to show me, but he didn't have time to deliver them: I would have to come to his concert and look at them.

Being a classical music student, I was pretty nervous about setting foot in a jam-packed theater full of impressive electronic equipment and amplifiers so tall they seemed like skyscrapers. I was even more nervous when Frank's bodyguard escorted me downstairs to a dressing room, and there I met Frank Zappa. He brought out some of his scores. I looked at them and realized they were far too complicated for me to comprehend just sitting there. I asked if I could study them a little more. Frank said, "Sure, go on, hold on to them as long as you want." And so, after watching a very interesting and complicated rock show complete with choreography and conducting, I left with the scores under my arm.

I had been really struck by his performance and his music. I was surprised that someone could be so multi-talented, such a good writer, and so articulate a composer. He was extremely progressive, in terms of the electronic and computer-generated sounds that he had come up with. He was also such a talented engineer. His records were and *are* exceptional, just on the basis of the recording quality alone. Moreover, he was a virtuoso technician on guitar and had an incredible sense of humor. He had all of those skills *and* the ability to conceive, write, and orchestrate very complex orchestral scores. These kinds of musical syntaxes usually take a master's degree to even grapple with, and even then, most composers with degrees don't necessarily have the inspiration to go along with their knowledge. Here was someone who was such a Renaissance man that he was free to float from one skill to another. To summarize, I was not only impressed by the music, I also really liked it, and *that* I think was an important step in getting to know him as a person — because my liking was genuine.

I asked Frank if I could perform some of his music with the Berkeley Symphony. I thought it would be challenging for the musicians and interesting for our audiences, and we might actually serve the purpose of opening the window for the world to see what sort of compositions he had outside of the rock ensemble setting. One thing led to another, and Frank decided to have a huge project that would include a public performance of his works and a recording of these very large orchestral pieces. The London Symphony Orchestra was chosen, and the conductor selected was me, a choice that was totally unsolicited and a complete surprise to me. Frank Zappa is capable of choosing whomever he wants to work with. It certainly wasn't necessary at all for him to choose me. I had just had that one brief meeting with him in Berkeley, and had only spoken to him a few times over the telephone. But, of course, being chosen was a tremendous privilege, honor, and opportunity. I found out two years ago that he had done pretty detailed research on my work. He had called a lot of my colleagues — composers, conductors, and players in the various symphonies — to find out if I had any talent.



I had to educate myself when the London project became concrete. I knew certain pieces I liked, but I certainly wasn't literate in the Frank Zappa style. I bought and listened to all of his records again and again. In educating myself, I asked Frank for examples of some of his other works, and he played me an improvisation where he had locked some people inside a grand piano and left them there for a long time with a microphone inside and a tape recorder running. It was a theater piece, but it made a fascinating improvisation. The tones were amazing: humans trapped inside a grand piano for hours on end, creating sympathetic vibrations on the strings and experiencing the gradual drifting away from rational to irrational thought. The sounds coming off of his tape were certainly as experimental as the most experimental work that I'd ever heard by composition students.

The concert took place in London in the early 80s. The evening of the performance, I had butterflies in my stomach, but it was more a combination of anxiety and enthusiasm than actual fear. There was definitely a feeling that something enormous was about to happen. The reception was pretty predictably unpredictable in that the hall was half-filled with normal LSO concert goers and half-filled with Frank Zappa enthusiasts, some of whom had never seen a symphony orchestra before. Because of that mix of listeners, there was an electric tension in the air, since people had no idea what to expect. But the London Symphony was 100% behind the concert and behind Frank, and they played extremely well. By the end of the evening, there was curtain call after curtain call, including an ovation by the orchestra for Frank.

Afterwards, we went into a studio. Frank was right there next to me. He demonstrated he had impeccable ears and absolute command of the scores. That was one of the reasons why the London Symphony respected him so much. Professional musicians often have to deal with composers who don't really hear what they've written on the page. If it makes a difference to a composer if you're playing a *B*-flat or a *B*-natural, it inspires you to do a good job. When a conductor is working so quickly with such limited rehearsal time, a composer can either be a tremendous help or hindrance depending on how nervous he is. I include Frank in the category of composers who are keenly in tune with their own work, how it's being rehearsed, how it's developing, and who can participate and help correct the wrong notes, make suggestions, and change phrasing on the spot in ways that might be easier or more musical to play.

I WAS SURPRISED THAT SOMEONE COULD BE SO MULTI-TALENTED. HE WAS A VIRTUOSO TECHNICIAN ON GUITAR, HAD AN INCREDIBLE SENSE OF HUMOR, AND HAD THE ABILITY TO CONCEIVE AND WRITE VERY COMPLEX ORCHESTRAL SCORES.

Moreover, he gives you a full orchestral score he has himself prepared extremely professionally. No one ever complains about his notation. And that's a chronic problem with composers: Either

their hand or the copying is so terrible, it's hard to read. But Frank has always had first-class copyists work on his music. Now that most of his music is done by Synclavier, the parts are perfect and extremely detailed in terms of tempo markings and dynamics. In terms of pitch notation, everything is playable. Sometimes things are not necessarily the most comfortable or idiomatic to play. Sometimes things are extremely complicated: glockenspiel, xylophone, harp, and strings *pizzicato* in unison; irrational rhythms like 17 against 3. These are very difficult to play, which gives rise to arguments like, "There must be a different way to notate this," or, "Do we really have to do it this way?" And Frank would say, "Well, gee, my rock band can do it; can't you?" When you get that kind of response, it makes the point.

One of the areas that is left wide open to interpretation is his usage of nomenclature or descriptive adjectives which we concert musicians don't oftentimes see. "Smorzando" was a favorite of Frank's. It's a real word meaning to sort of smokily die away. Frank uses it to describe something that jazz musicians often do. But after he defined it, all these bewildered musicians — myself included — understood what he wanted.

There were other unusual things — for example, for an orchestra to play a solo while doing an extroverted mime. It's not as if it's impossible to do: The guy who's still the principal cellist at the Albert Hall did it very well. He put on quite a dramatic performance. But how do you notate that sort of thing where there are a lot of elements of theater and music combined together? These sorts of things need added explanation.

Another really remarkable thing about Frank: He was totally open to inspiration from others. Oftentimes I would change tempi: I'd suggest a *rubato* here, I'd suggest some phrasing dynamic, or some musician would say, "Gee, is it all right if I do such and such?" Frank was all for it. He would weigh every suggestion very carefully before saying yes or no, but he definitely had an open mind and seemed to enjoy the creative process of making these pieces happen. I find some composers become really involved in the syntax and not so much the semantics of what things are trying to be communicated. In Frank's case, the expression of the content of the music seems so strong that he's able to entertain other people's suggestions.

He's a fascinating guitarist, as well. I learned a lot by watching him play guitar — his phrasing, his timing, the way that he can create dramatic tension. The French have a great word that helps describe some of Frank's playing: *enervé*, which implies you become not exactly irritated, but sort of tense. You hear this when the rhythms of Frank's guitar playing never come to a full resting point. They phrase the way a phrase will, but they actually never come to sit on a big, fat, ripe cadence. Sometimes they don't fully ripen to a cadence until the end of a concert three hours later. There's a lot to be learned from that, if guitarists are open to using that as a tool in their own music-making.

Early on, I believed Frank would be remembered as a very important composer, as someone who had a tremendous impact on the direction of music, and today I don't feel any differently. That doesn't necessarily mean he will be identified with any particular school or era of composition. We have this terrible habit of pigeonholing different types of music. Frank Zappa doesn't fit into any category. The best you could say is that Frank's writing — both his popular music and his symphonic writing — draws from many sources. If there is a style, I'd call it an American style, because when you listen to his music with fresh ears, you can tell immediately that this was written by an American: It has an American feel to it, an American concept of rhythm and harmony and melody, an American concept of humor and irony. You can feel the American culture being communicated throughout the entire spectrum of his works — both pop and non-pop music, the same way you hear it in the music of Aaron Copland, or Leonard Bernstein, or Charles Ives. I feel that history will be very kind to Frank Zappa's music. People will look back and see it as a tremendous release of wonderful joy and expression, of certain cultural things that our country was going through from the '60s on through today. He's going to have a tremendous influence. Many years from now, people will look back and finally see what sort of influence he had on the direction of both popular and non-popular music.

He's really funny. A lot of people try to be humorous and aren't. But Frank's humor is so subtle that you find yourself laughing even if you don't want to. That humor is part of his style. It's part of American style. Some say that other cultures don't handle humor as well, that we in America have a special kind of irony that one doesn't find everywhere. I've often heard people say about Olivier Messiaen's music: "Doggone it! He keeps using the words 'God' and 'Jesus' all the time. If he just wasn't so religious, maybe he'd be more popular than he is." What a strange thing to say! And I find it strange when someone says, "Gee, if Frank weren't so humorous, maybe people would take his music more seriously." The text is the text, and it's part of the composition — it's an inherent characteristic of the composition, and it's part of the composer's personality. And it's only the summation of *all* of those elements that comes up with the finished product. It really comes down to the level of commitment of the performance, doesn't it? If a work is not performed well, you can find any number of things to attack in the composition. But if a piece is performed very well with a total commitment of the players, the conductor, and everyone involved, even imperfections somehow become less relevant, because the message got through.

Costs make Frank's works very difficult for a traditional institution to mount. They call for huge orchestras — much larger than normal, and the scores are expensive to produce. They're difficult from a technical standpoint, and that requires much more rehearsal time than a standard-repertoire piece. That, too, is very expensive, involving a lot of overtime for a lot of extra musicians. Composers always take a risk if they choose to write for an ensemble that's not easily put together. The chances for getting a performance become rarer and rarer. In Frank's case, that may have had something to do with the fact that we hadn't heard of the pieces that much before this period when the Albert Hall concerts were taking place. Who in their right mind would want to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars for the preparation of a work that was written by some wild rock musician for a traditional symphonic institution?

Frank is a genius. That's a word I don't use often, because true geniuses are very rare. In Frank's case, it's not too strong a word. He backs his genius up with reading, research, and study. He is extremely literate musically. I'm not sure if the general public knows that. When I was about to give one of the rare performances of Varese's "Amérique," I thought of various people I could call on to give an introductory lecture on the piece — its history, the orchestration content, the revolutionary aspects, what was interesting, etc. Right at the top of my list was Frank Zappa. So I ended up asking him to step in, in place of a musicologist, to give the introduction to my audiences. This kind of knowledge doesn't just come from the air. It comes from a lot of listening, a lot of studying, and from someone who makes it a point to be literate.

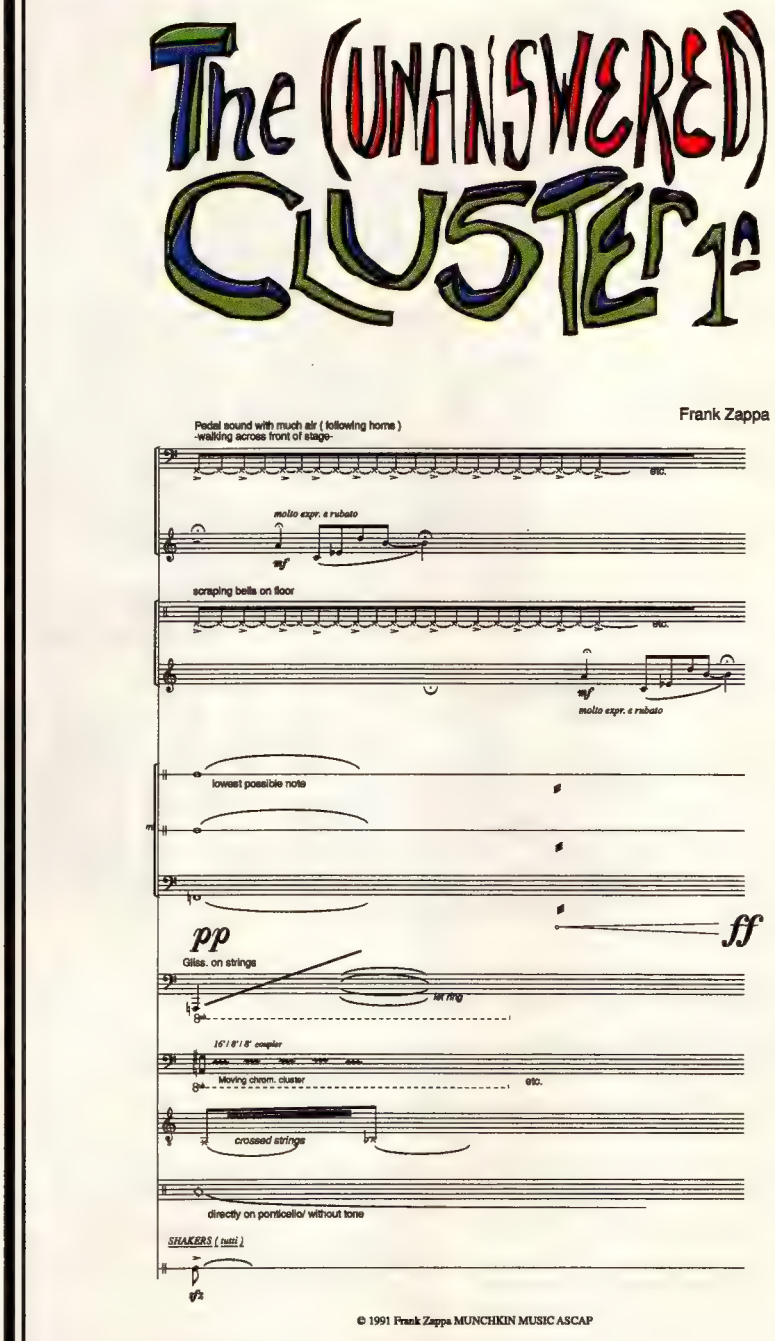
One of the most moving things for a conductor is to champion a composer, to see that composer obtain recognition for music which you had some small part in helping bring out, and then to see that the composer doesn't stop, but continues to evolve and get better and better. So many composers, after they've reached their moment of immense popularity, become vulnerable to the tremendous temptations to simply redo what they've done before in an attempt to have another success. That's always disappointing if you've invested a lot of energy because you hope that person will keep progressing and become a leader. Frank has done that over the last 20

years. Some of his new improvisations with the Ensemble Modern were just inspired — thrilling to listen to. His creative outlet is like a spigot that will never turn off. He's constantly writing music. I don't think even Frank knows how many pieces he's done.

One big point of argument that Frank and I had back then and that we still have today: I make a very strong distinction between entertainment and art. Entertainment is different from art, in my book, and I always get very annoyed when an arts institution tries to pass itself off as an entertainment conglomerate. I get very irritated when symphony orchestras give free tickets out to baseball clients and ask them to come to some all-Mozart concert being hosted by a television talk-show host after being prepared with one rehearsal. An attempt like that doesn't help anything or anybody. It doesn't help an orchestra build an audience because you don't necessarily make a crossover from a Mozartean going to a baseball game or a baseball enthusiast coming to a Mozart concert. The equation just doesn't necessarily transfer. What does suffer are the people who would rather be watching baseball! And poor Mozart, who's having his music massacred. It's terrible when you start confounding people or confusing that line.

Frank, however, feels that everything should be entertainment. He's said that on several occasions to me. He said if it's not entertaining, what's the point? I've always treated Frank's music as works with great artistic merit, and have interpreted them as such, and have tried to communicate the things that only art can communicate, because art can communicate a whole spectrum of emotions and values that entertainment by its definition does not. Frank's music is profound, and by that I'm implying it's multilayered and can be listened to over and over again. It has different dimensions to it, which only become apparent after repeated listening or study. That's not necessarily true when you're talking about the entertainment medium. Frank is funny, that's true. But he's also sad. And Frank is mean sometimes, but he also has an incredible amount of joy and love inside. It's much too simple to say that a composer writes music that is such-and-such, because conflicting emotions or conflicting signals will be sent at the same time, and that complex texture which is communicated is much closer to what we feel as human beings. That's why art is so complex, why people can spend lifetimes studying it, but you might not necessarily spend that same amount of time or effort studying a film that comes out of Hollywood.

Frank's circle of contacts is enormous. They range from heads of countries to cultural dignitaries throughout the world. I'm just one of a whole network of people who have been touched and influenced by Frank. But if I was able to help get his music out, then I think it's been for the good of everybody. What a great experience! **Z**



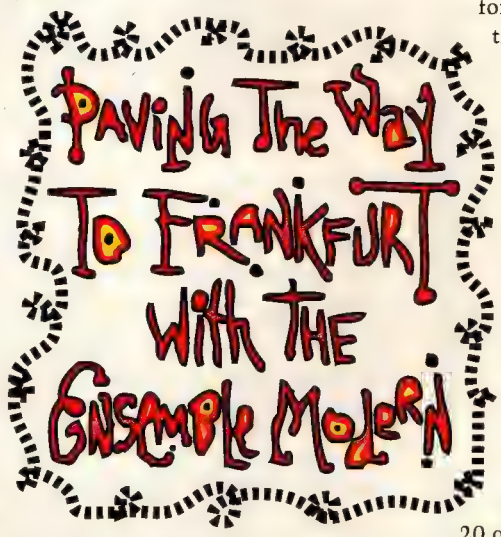
THE CLUSTERS ARE EXPERIMENTS THAT WERE CONDUCTED WITH THE ENSEMBLE MODERN IN JULY OF 1991. I WOULD JUST MAKE THINGS UP, WE WOULD EXPERIMENT AND, IF IT SOUNDED GOOD, KEEP IT; IF NOT, WE'D DUMP IT. EACH MUSICIAN HAD A PIECE OF PAPER, AND HE WOULD WRITE DOWN WHATEVER THE INSTRUCTIONS WERE FOR HIS PARTICULAR INSTRUMENT, AND ALI ASKIN COLLECTED THOSE THINGS AND SUMMARIZED THEM. THAT'S WHAT YOU SEE HERE, IN ONE OF THE MINI-SCORES. I WOULD STAND THERE WITH THE BATON AND TELL PEOPLE WHAT TO PLAY. I TRIED IT ON GUITAR BUT IT DIDN'T WORK THAT WELL, BECAUSE THE LEVEL OF PATTERN RECOGNITION VARIED WIDELY FROM MEMBER TO MEMBER. WE'D ASK THE PLAYERS TO WRITE DOWN THE LICKS I PLAYED AND FOUND THAT WE HAD 25 DIFFERENT VERSIONS. – FRANK ZAPPA

Andreas Mölich-Zebhauser

"MY FIRST REACTION WAS THAT I COULDN'T BELIEVE it," states Andreas Mölich-Zebhauser, "Five years ago, when I learned that Frank was a composer of serious classical music, I told my partners, 'Okay, there's some of these pop stars who try to do this kind of stuff, but I am quite sure that he is just a beginner.' I was really surprised when I saw the high quality of compositions like 'Mo 'N Herb's Vacation.'"

Mölich-Zebhauser is general manager and director of the Deutsche Ensemble Academy, the umbrella organization of three orchestras: the Ensemble Modern, the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, and the Deutsche Chame Philharmonie. Born in Hamburg, raised in Gelsenkirchen, Andreas was first exposed to classical music by his mother, who was a singer, and his father, who was a conductor and concert pianist.

His professional career has ranged from musician ("Wherever I moved, I'd take five or ten plastic bags with my clothes — and my piano"), to artistic director of Peters Music and then Ricordi. "At first contemporary music didn't go so easily into my ear," Mölich-Zebhauser confesses. "But in the '80s, I realized there were certain qualities in it not so easily discovered, and if you go in the first step you will become very surprised."



As treasurer of the Contemporary Music Society of Germany in 1984, he became aware of the Ensemble Modern. A prime effort of the society had been to help support the Ensemble, which — since its founding in 1974 by Karsten Witt — had become famous for its performance of difficult music. Mölich-Zebhauser joined the Ensemble's problem committee, helped with finances, and was appointed director when Witt left to become managing director of Wienkonzerthaus.

Normally, box office receipts pay only 10 to 20% of a German orchestra's bills, and deficits are covered by government subsidies. With the Ensemble, the opposite is true. The entity is nearly self-supporting, acquiring less than 20% of its money from public funding. Incorporated as a business ("but a very poor business," he laughs), it has about 20 owners — the musicians and Mölich-Zebhauser. All decisions regarding hiring, firing, music to be performed, and projects to be undertaken are made democratically. The level of commitment by the member musicians is extraor-

dinary. "They play so enthusiastically and with a tremendous intensity you wouldn't find with a normal orchestra," Andreas emphasizes. "This is not a multi-tiered orchestra with a fifth-row string section. This is an ensemble of *soloists*, since it is common that many composers of modern music write soloist parts for every musician."

Zappa came to the attention of the selection committee through Dr. Dieter Rexroth, who runs the world-acclaimed Frankfurt Festival. He felt it important that Frank be shown to the world not as a rock star but as a serious composer. That Zappa was singled out with John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Alexander Knaifel is the honor of a lifetime, because of the international prestige of the event and the individual focus given to the honored composers: an entire week of performances devoted exclusively to each of them during the month of September.

"Like many musicians, I was very interested in the music Frank wrote in the past, but there have been only a very few classical performances of his serious music," Mölich-Zebhauser says. "Besides, you cannot compare the music we play with either the rock or classical music he wrote before. It's a completely new thing."

In July 1991, the logistics began to solidify. The entire Ensemble chose to come to California to visit Zappa for two significant weeks. "This was the start of a very special and new way of composing," Mölich-Zebhauser states. "Normally in the classical field, a composer gets a commission, sits at his desk for a couple of months writing down notes, delivers a score to an orchestra which rehearses it, and in the last rehearsals the composer comes in and says, 'Oh yes, here you have to change something, and here please a little louder.' The opposite is true with our project. From the very beginning, we came together showing each other our capabilities. We played Frank some of the Ensemble's recordings. Frank let us hear some of his recent Synclavier music. In person, we showed Frank what level of difficulties in music we could realize, and on the other hand we saw what Frank was able to do. At the end of this working period we knew a lot about Frank Zappa, and he had very precise information about what he could do with and for the Ensemble. That was the basis of his composition for this event."

ZEBHAUSER: OKAY, THERE'S SOME OF THESE POP STARS WHO TRY TO DO THIS KIND OF STUFF, BUT I WAS QUITE SURE THAT HE WAS JUST A BEGINNER. I WAS SURPISED.

The project has proven to be enormously expensive, but worth it to all concerned. Travel alone to visit Zappa cost the group 500,000 marks. Financial support came primarily from the Alte Oper of Frankfurt and Siemens, the computer giant. "We wanted to make no compromise of what Frank wanted, and all we hoped was to cover expenses."

The historic Frankfurt world premiere occurred on September 17th, was repeated on the 18th and 19th, moved on to Berlin on the 22nd and 23rd, and concluded in Vienna on the 26th and 27th. The Zappa event marked the first time dancers had come into the building, the first time a lighted set was installed, and the first time an amplification system of such complexity was allowed in. It was also recorded and filmed. "Berlin was the largest surprise," Mölich-Zebhauser says. "That is the seat of the world-famous Berlin Philharmonic. It is a sacred area, like a church — no, more like a cathedral. It is the St. Peter's Church of classical music — not a place normally used for music of the style of Frank Zappa." **Z**

THE ENSEMBLE MODERN: THIS IS NOT A MULTI-TIERED ORCHESTRA WITH A FIFTH-ROW STRING SECTION. THIS IS AN ENSEMBLE OF *SOLOISTS*.

Top Photo: Fritz Brinckmann/Herz; Bottom Right: Hans Jorg Michel

Warren De Martini

Though he has never played on a Zappa record, Warren De Martini is one of a handful of guitar players singled out by Frank as worth listening to. The 29-year-old lead guitarist has skills and finesse beyond what is usually exhibited in the confines of Ratt, the group he fronted for a decade. Last November, as *Zappa's Universe* was being pulled together by Joel Thome, Warren received the call that put him onstage soloing on "I Am the Slime" for the controversial birthday tribute to Frank. He cranked up and wailed in the rarified atmosphere of such hand-picked Zappa interpreters as guitarists Mike Keneally, Scott Thunes, Steve Vai, and Dweezil Zappa, keyboardists Lorin Hollander and Mats Øberg, percussionists Morgan Agren, vocalist Dale Bozzio, Maureen McNalley, and Doug Perry, as well as the entire lineup of the legendary Persuasions. De Martini was honored to be part of the show. "I don't want to belittle it by trying to say what it means to me, because I don't have the facility to really do that. That Frank Zappa likes what I do is the best compliment I could ever have.

"He let me pick the songs for the tribute. I worked on the *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore* version of "I Am the Slime." And he ended up going, 'Well, it will get applause, but let's mix it up and do a really different arrangement.' He came up with an arrangement, and we worked on it for about four hours. Just watching him think of stuff was the best, because every 32 bars it would change completely. The verse would change, and then it would go into something completely different from the bridge, and then it would go into this feel and that feel. It was exceedingly good fun."

De Martini is happy to point out Zappa's importance to younger listeners: "Someone from the MTV generation is probably going to listen to stuff that's being pushed, which is fine. But then there's going to be a time when those young people will learn that by the time the music gets from the writer to the finished product, it's been reworked several times in different ways. Frank is an example of doing things your own way and doing things the way you want them to sound, as a completely unbiased piece of music from one's soul to the recording with nothing interfering. I have a lot of respect for Frank's attitude to keep it the way it was written, whether it has commercial potential or not. Basically just doing things the way *you* hear them.

"One wouldn't have to be interested in guitar very long to discover Frank Zappa. And the more you explore *that*, the better, because he's put out unabridged recordings of just great music. It's encouraging for music in general that Frank has persevered through insisting on doing things his own way.

"When he talks about the early days, it sounds like there used to be some old guy with a cigar who would say, 'What the fuck, sign 'em.' As though they really didn't know what they were dealing with, and that's kind of how *he* got in there. It was like he lucked out because some record company guys viewed signing people as not that much different than playing craps. And from that lucky break, he was able to move in his own way. I disagree with Frank. I think he would have made it regardless of when he started.

"He has a really exceptional catalog of work. It's difficult for me to say where it all fits in, but I think it's important for young players to check it out, because it really is like nothing else going on. In this age of plagiarism, it's fresh.

"From a guitar standpoint, he improvises in the true sense of the word, where nothing is worked out. He's just going on pure intuition, what he's hearing in his head at that particular point. He seems aware of the key and tempo, but other than that, it's not something premeditated." **Z**

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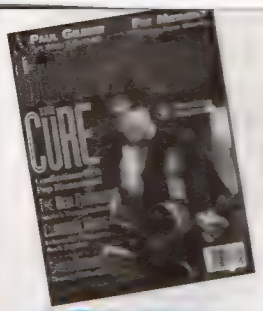

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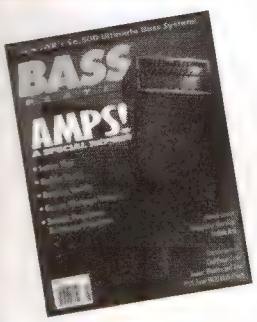

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FORMER MOTHER DRUMMER

AYNSLEY DUNBAR

LAST SEEN ROVING WITH DAVID BOWIE, THE STARSHIP, JOURNEY, AND WHITESNAKE

Backing Frank Zappa from 1970 until 1973, Aynsley Dunbar, just another lad from Liverpool, was with Zappa during two terrible nights at the end of the 1972 tour, when fire destroyed their equipment in Geneva (and inspired Deep Purple to write "Smoke on the Water") and in London at their next gig when Frank was thrown off stage and severely injured by an enraged "fan." As one of Zappa's favorite drummers, Dunbar lived in the Zappa home for his first nine months in the United States, and remained close to the family even after he went off on his own to accumulate a long string of credits as drummer with some of rock's most celebrated individuals and groupings, including Flo & Eddie, Lou Reed, David Bowie, John Lennon, Journey, the Starship, and Whitesnake.

✷ ✧ ✤ ✷

Frank is a drummer. The percussion side in his music has always received a huge amount of attention — he always worked on it. You can't just sit there and not notice that percussion is going on like mad under everything. So that alone makes a difference in the quality of his music, because the majority of musicians have no idea of what it is to play drums. They think it's simple until they come to try to put it down on tape which is why there are so many mundane songs on the radio now, because they end up with a mundane 4/4 track which just follows a drum machine. Frank, having played drums, always expected to hear *more* from them. All the time, there is a definite flow underneath happening with drums.

Working with Frank was always a challenge. There was always something interesting happening. You had to be very alert and thinking all the time. From the point of view of everybody else that I've worked with, it's always been straightforward and clear. With Frank it's more of a game; it's like a maze. You don't really know where you're going because something just comes in there and completely throws you to something else. It's amazing how complex Frank's music gets. Sometimes, his satirical lyrics would overshadow the music. People didn't understand what was actually happening or how difficult the music is to play. They just wanted to focus on the lyrics as though they were just the main part of another weird song.

Frank rehearsed the band in such a unique way. With no direction of where anything was going, he would rehearse all the hard parts first. He'd do sixteen bars of this section, then stop, and start on something else. Then, after everybody knew those parts, he'd start joining little things, and suddenly you'd have a whole run of songs, and you'd basically know how they all went.

"THIS IS AYNSLEY. HE SOUNDS LIKE TWO DRUMMERS."

He'd let us know what the time was going to be, and the band would have chord charts or the melodies written out, and I'd just pick up what I was supposed to be playing. I'd just *feel* the melody. I knew what I was supposed to be doing, and he liked what I did. He liked fire in playing, and when I played there was always fire — I was always moving and always kicking ass. When Frank took off, I took off. He was more jazz inclined than anything else. So if you feel everything jazz-wise, it seemed to fit with what he was doing, until he came to the regular rock and roll type things. Of course, there were always times, if certain things didn't fit, when he'd have to explain what's going on.

Frank was very easy to work with. I cannot remember any hard parts. He was always respectful and very straightforward. If some problem came up, he'd ask what I thought could be done about it, because he didn't want to put any ideas in my head. He wanted to know what *my* thoughts were. It was always very enjoyable, but there were certain things that he didn't like to have to deal with. Anybody who did drugs was fired because he wanted quick-thinking people.

Frank's more knowledgeable than other band leaders. He knew everything that was going on and what he expected to hear. I don't know if he wrote his songs around the musicians or what, but eventually he became more and more technical. By the time I finished playing with Frank, everything was all written down — even the drum parts. There *were* solo areas where you could ad lib, but the music was a lot more studied, and it started taking away from my thoughts. He really required a classical player, somebody who read, who was brought up with that sort of idea. Since I play with feeling more than sight-reading, there came a time when my mind just got bogged down with the technical side of things. I got to the point where I just had to get out and play some loose things, something more straight from the heart. I needed to play some more of *me*. Frank was in the hospital at that time, and it was at a point where we weren't doing anything anyway. When I told him I wanted to leave, he asked me if I thought I was doing the right thing, and I said I just had to play something simple for a while.

Nobody has ever astounded me as much or made it as thrilling to play with. Frank was very nice. We got along more like a family than a business deal. Whenever anybody came over, he would say, "This is Aynsley. He sounds like two drummers." But I just took it for granted. I just knew I was somewhere, but I never knew where. I always look back and wonder what would have happened if I'd stayed. **Z**

LIKE FATHER, LIKE MUNCHKINS

I ALWAYS LOVED MY DAD'S MUSIC.

There was never a point in my life where I didn't like it, but it was always too complex for me to really lift from it. I started playing guitar when I was 12 years old. When you first hear Frank's music, you don't immediately think, "Oh, I can play that." But now that I understand more about music, and why things sound the way they do when you place them together, and now that I also have a stronger technical ability, my dad's music makes more sense to me, and I lift a lot more stuff from it.

Since I started playing live shows, there's been so much more influence. Prior to that, you wouldn't have really heard it that much. When people used to say, "You sound like Frank," half the time I'd say they were absolutely wrong. I used to sound more like Van Halen than Frank Zappa. With the newer stuff, though, I'd have to say, "Hey, you've got a point there." It's only now that I've gotten more proficient on the guitar that I can even understand what's going on in his music. It's really coming through now that I am my father's son. Even my drummers. . . . Terry [Bozzio, drummer] was just laughing about how my stuff is getting so complex. He didn't think it was going to be as much work when he came in. He had played with me before, but it wasn't anywhere near as crazy as it is now.

I do have Frank's innate sense of twisting things and taking them to an extreme that somebody else wouldn't. Just because I've always heard how far my dad will go in one direction with something, it's natural for me to think, "Oh, I can take this progression, and I can go like this."

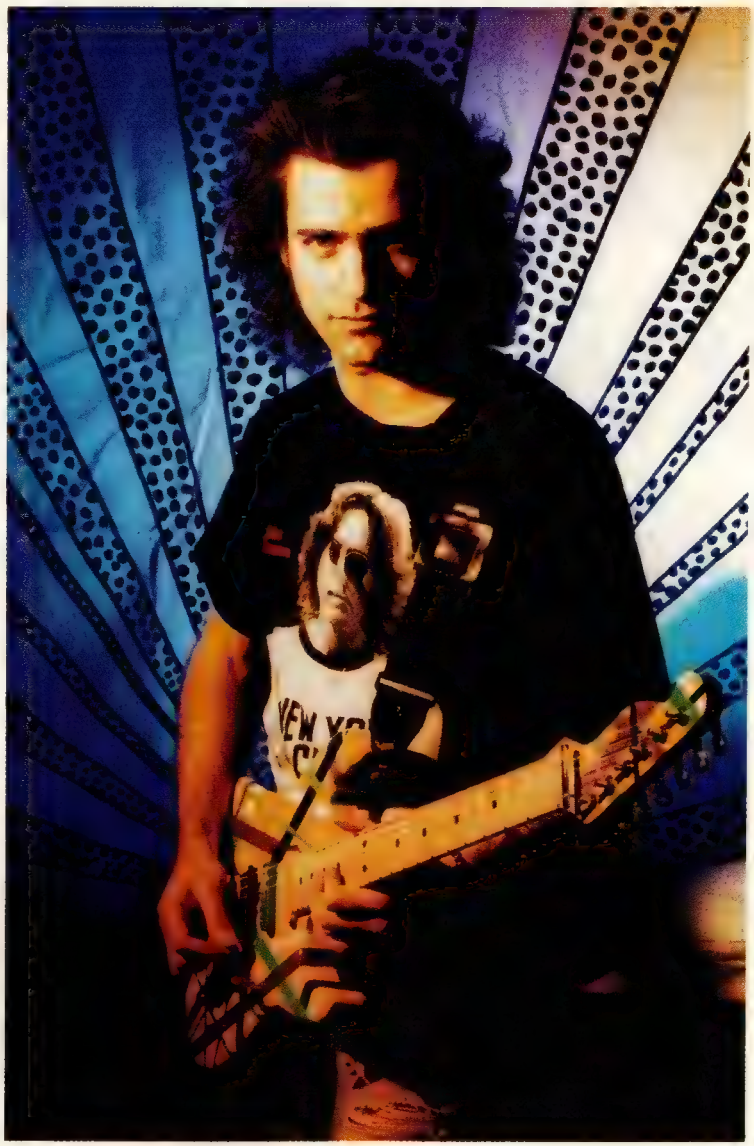
When we're home at night, Ahmet and I will stay up late and listen to Frank's

records that we heard when we were little — before we could understand them. Now I listen to records like *Bongo Fury*, and I'm going, "Fuck, dude, that's the hottest record!" Years ago, I wouldn't have understood it. But now Ahmet and I find these records, and it's like a treasure chest for us. We sit there and go, "This is the coolest thing. I can't believe that he did this, and this was *what* year!?"

In particular, I like *Overnite Sensation*, *One Size Fits All*, *Apostrophe*, and *Sheik Yerbouti*. That has the song "Baby Snakes" on it. When I was little and first heard it, I thought it was a little cute song about baby snakes. I didn't know about all of the other stuff that was going on in it, like the SMPTE code things. That stuff goes right over your head when you're little. Now that I know what SMPTE is, I'm going, "Oh, great. He made a little jingle for the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers out of a stupid little hideous code that goes on your tape to keep it in sync." All these things that are on these records each year make more and more sense, become more interesting and more influential, on me and Ahmet both.

It's fun. I don't think there are too many people who could sit there and say that about their folks. Most people wouldn't have the opportunity to go through their parents' things and find a musical time machine. I just marvel at the accomplishments that Frank made during a time when you weren't allowed to do things. To know that Frank has accomplished all the things that he has accomplished with such adversity at every step of the way — lawsuits, being fucked over by managers and record companies — to be able to own his masters of everything he's recorded and basically say, "Fuck you!" to the system. There's nobody who's done that — with the exception of maybe Sinatra.

In school nobody knew who my dad was until I got older. The fact that I was his son meant nothing to me other than that "Zappa" was our name. I'm 22 now, so, when I was growing up, Frank Zappa was virtually unheard of in the younger generation. Maybe their older brother or their parents had heard of him, and they'd go, "Oh, he's the wild, crazy guy." There was just a stupid misconception of him.



DWEEZIL, AT 22, HAS PUT OUT THREE CDS: *HAVIN' A BAD DAY*, *MY GUITAR WANTS TO KILL YOUR MAMA*, AND *CONFESSIONS OF A DEPRIVED YOUTH*. BROTHER AHMET, NOW 18, SANG "FWAK" ON *CONFESSIONS* AND WILL BE VOCALIST ON THE NEXT DWEEZIL ZAPPA BAND RELEASE NEXT SPRING.

But now that I'm older, there are more people my age who know about Frank and his music. He's regarded as much more of an intellectual, you know — the People's Person for Politics. They know he played music and did "Yellow Snow," but they know him these days more as the guy who spearheaded the censorship protest. So it's real weird. People don't know him as he first came to be known. Young people don't realize that guys like Warren De Martini or Edward Van Halen would ever be influenced by anyone. That's how we met Van Halen — he called out of the blue because he wanted to meet Frank. The only way young musicians will find out why is to finally become completely annoyed and bored with what's been made available to them and to go search out Frank's stuff on their own. They sure won't hear it on the radio, except from the occasional freak DJ who will play something after midnight and risk getting fired from his job.

A lot of people my age think of Frank's music as novelty music. They think, "Oh yeah — 'Titties and Beer' or 'Yellow Snow.' Those are songs Dr. Demento plays." They have no idea of how many people went through Frank's bands. A lot of people know of Frank's music *because* Steve Vai played with him. They see Steve with someone like David Lee Roth, and they think, "If Steve Vai plays like that, man, I've got to check out what he was doing before. Frank Zappa, huh? Have I been missing out on somebody who was doing all this crazy guitar shit years ago?" Then, when they get the record, they have no idea what they are listening to, because they think they're gonna hear Steve Vai sound the way he sounds on a David Lee Roth or Whitesnake record.

If people are looking for something that is going to stimulate thought and entertain them, they should be listening to Frank's music. There are enough ideas to draw on from every style of music to keep you interested for the rest of your life, stuff that cannot be duplicated. What's miraculous about the way Frank has controlled his career and his recordings is that he has captured things on tape that can never ever be played the same way again. There's almost nothing on the planet like that. That's what's so cool about it, because that's where music is most effective, when it feels like it's being made up at that moment. Improvisational music is really hit-or-miss, but Frank's got a really high percentage of scores on improvisational music and on a ton of guitar solos.

Every time I tell him how great I think his solo is on "Black Napkins," he starts wondering what the hell is wrong with me. It's the version from this Halloween concert in New York that was broadcast on MTV years ago — one of the coolest solos that I remember him playing. It was about the only solo that I could actually learn

Photo: Jeffrey Weiss

to play, because it had a really simple line through the whole thing. The phrasing on most of his stuff gets so out to lunch, it's impossible to learn, because he's got these techniques of scraping across the strings, and you can't tell what notes he's hitting and what he's not, because part of the sound is just the scrapes. He hates that solo. He says that was one of the worst solos he's ever played.

But I always liked my dad's guitar work. I always thought he played really cool stuff. Since Frank tends to play in modes that are not recognized as guitaristic boxes to play in, you don't hear it and think, "I could learn how to do that." To mimic a Frank Zappa solo, you'd have to be a fuckin' maniac who has a lot of knowledge of a lot of different things and a lot of time on your hands to weed out how to copy his technique. I can't do it to save my life. I could do little elements of his phrasing, but he's totally out of control.

Frank does not have a stock lick that he'll rely on. Each time he takes a solo, he's composing a piece that goes along with whatever he feels at that moment, and that's what's so twisted — he doesn't think like a guitar player. He thinks in terms of a whole spectrum — like making air sculpture, as he calls it. Guitar players who grow up the way I grew up, listening to Van Halen solos, think in terms of stupid guitar licks or tricks they can add, put with this or this, or piece together on the neck. Frank doesn't think like that at all.

Some people make playing look so simple: Steve Vai, Van Halen, Warren De Martini — their fingering is so precise and dead-on. There's almost no element or possibility of a mistake. But when you watch Frank, you're going, "How did he play that?" You can't even figure it out, because his left hand looks like the weirdest, most twisted spider and his picking hand looks like a spastic chicken. His fingerings look nothing like what I'm used to seeing when I play something on the guitar. You watch it and you go, "What the hell is that?" Then the sound comes out, and he *always* has the most amazing guitar tones. They're so much beyond what a guitar is suppose to sound like. That's what's cool about it. Especially when you hear early records, you're thinking, "Fuck, that's like the early '70s, and listen to that guitar sound." You can't get a guitar sound like that anymore, because nobody has conditioned their ear to even think of playing something like Frank did all the time.

He's just far ahead of his time, in terms of ideas for what to do to make a guitar not sound like a guitar. Who else could play an 18-minute guitar solo and keep you interested? If you're going to play an 18-minute guitar solo, you'd better either have a million tricks that no one has ever heard of, or you'd better think of things from a completely different perspective that creates a musical landscape that makes you think and continue to stay interested. If you're just going out there and spitting out some dumb *weedlie weedlie* solo, people are just going to get bored and say, "Okay, yeah, hmm, thank you, all right, got to go. Yes, indeed."

If you have an open mind to all styles of music, and you appreciate anybody who does something that requires thought and creativity, then it's virtually undeniable that you would appreciate Frank's music. The stuff that he's accomplished is amazing. Frank always had the ability to use and parody other styles so well. If I had that knowledge, I could be dangerous. Frank *has* that knowledge, so therefore he *is* dangerous. And he's gotten performances out of people that, whether they would admit it or not, they never would have performed had they not been given this sort of direction to go there. He brought out the best elements of their creativity. People get to have fun doing something that doesn't sound like anything else that is out there. With Frank it's not like, "Oh, here's our big hit single," and everybody gets to have an attitude like: "Check me out while I twirl my sticks and then hit the snare drum." "Isn't my hair so cool when I stand *this* way and play my bass in the spotlight?" "Check me out as I flip over while I play my guitar solo." That kind of stuff never existed with Frank unless he told them to behave that way for a joke. I was too young to know anything about the Mothers Of Invention. I didn't even exist when that stuff came out. Then, as I was growing up, I would look at Frank's guys playing and think, "Oh, they're playing this and this — kind of looks easy." But, *you* try to play any of it — I don't care who you are — it's going to give you some difficulty. He took people who are great at what they do, and pushed them in the direction to make them even better.

I've seen him in rehearsals. He comes in with a great idea already. Everybody learns the elements of it. If something funny happens in the break or somebody is particularly good at something, Frank will incorporate the best parts into each thing. That's what he enjoys doing. He likes taking an idea or just making something out of nothing. Suddenly, there it is. He enjoys the whole creative process. He has a tireless imagination. Look at the body of work! There are classics — great pieces of music — which, every time you hear them, you have the same reaction.

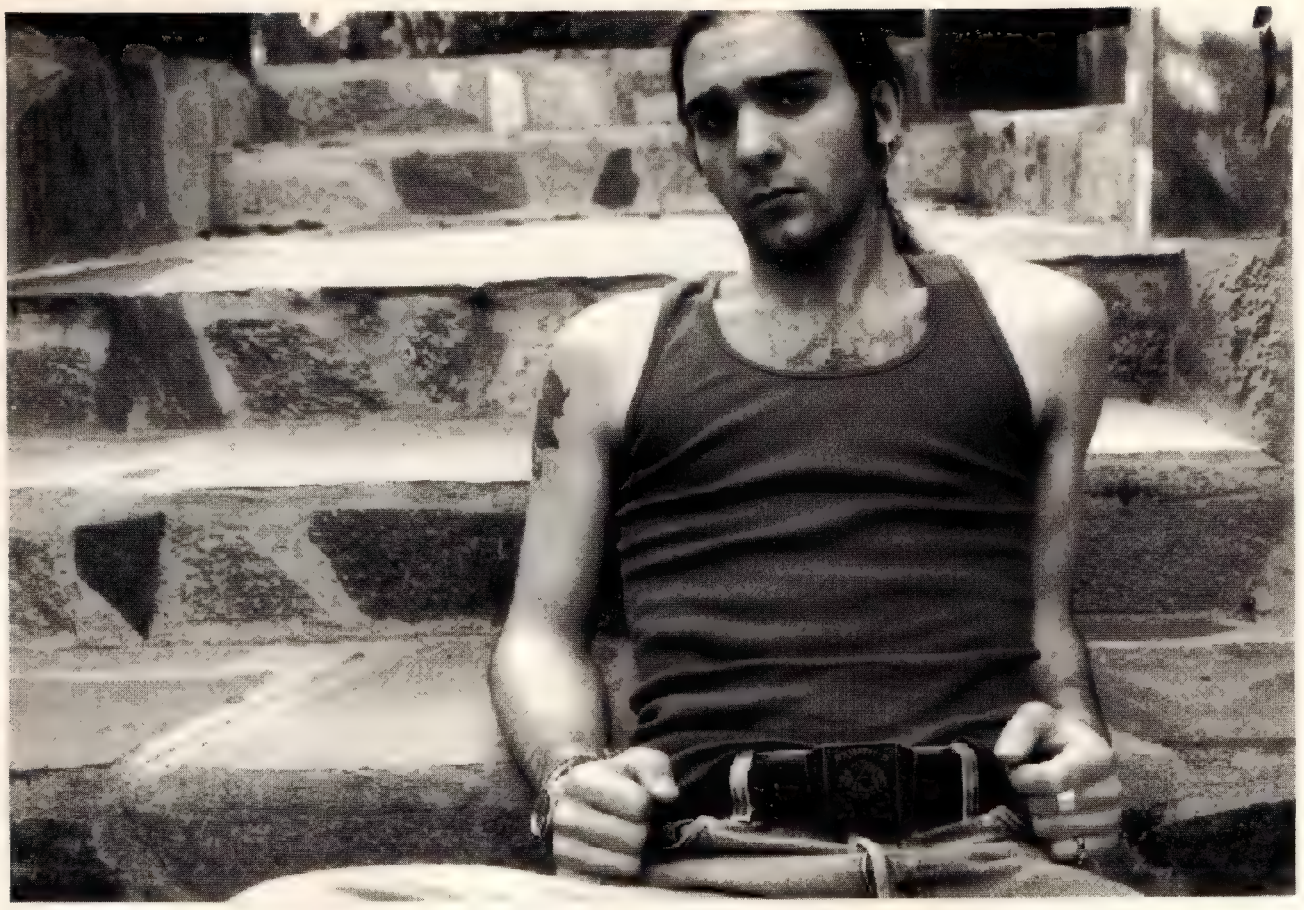
There aren't many songs — certainly not in popular music these days — which, if you heard them on the radio, you'd say, "Wow! If I hear that song in ten years, I'll still go, 'Wow! That's a great piece of music.'" So much music now is just disposable, the music of the moment. Do you think that anybody's gonna listen to one of these rap records and be as enthusiastic as when they heard it the week that it became the hip new thing to listen to? With the exception of a few things that have particular social commentary that might withstand the test of time, there's just a lot of pointless music being recorded and purchased.

Videos have been a big factor in killing musical creativity. You don't have any chance to appreciate music the way it was intended to be heard anymore. Now it's intended to be seen. You can literally make a song be more effective by having a good video. If the song is shit, and you have a great video for it, people will respond a lot better. They can even hear it on the radio and still be confused and say, "Yeah, I think that's a good song 'cause I like that video." If you heard it the first time on the radio, you'd go, "God damn! This is the most hideous song I ever heard." It's so rare that I even listen to radio anymore, but on the few occasions I do, I never say, "Wow, that's good. I wonder who that is." That happens at best once every eight or ten years.

Frank downplays a lot about his abilities. That's something that's really cool about him. But it's one thing to be humble; it's another to completely disallow anyone to give you any credit that you're actually really good at. I tell him all the time that he should make another guitar record or at least do something where he plays guitar over stuff he's doing on the Synclavier. What an interesting combination — to have all this computer music and then one human element, and *he's* the only guy who should or *could* play on something like that.

He just hasn't had any interest recently to pick up the guitar again. I've been trying to coax him into it ever so slightly. On his last birthday, I built him a whole new rack because he was complaining that he didn't have anything to play through. All of his stuff had just been sitting around collecting dust, and all of his guitars were fucked up. So, I got about ten or twelve of them fixed up to a point where they played better than any guitars I've ever played in the world. Everything from his Les Paul and his famous SGs to some of his acoustic guitars had been totally neglected, not put in cases, put aside with broken strings on them. I found a Jimi Hendrix guitar not even in a case, with Anvil cases sitting on top of it and collecting dust under the stairs down under the studio. It looked like somebody raped it and left it to die. I told Frank I'd like to rebuild it. He said, "You can have it." I said, "*Yeah!*" So I had it rebuilt, and the guitar was reborn. It's like the third generation now: Jimi's, then Frank's, then mine.

Recently, we spent a couple of days playing around together a little, which is more than we have ever done in my entire musical life. We've played guitar together maybe a couple of dozen times, but always onstage. We don't sit around jamming, though I'd sure like to do that. He intimidates me, and I really don't want to waste his time. What I'd really like is to do a whole guitar album with him. That would be *so* cool. **Z**



YOU'RE A VOCALIST, RIGHT? I GUESS THAT'S WHAT YOU CAN CALL IT. I MOSTLY DO MATING CALLS.

How long have you been singing?

I haven't started professionally singing. All my life I've just been humming tunes. I've been working with Dweezil for about a year and a half.

You were on the last album.

Yeah, I just did two or three songs.

How old were you when that was recorded?

Fifteen, just turning sixteen.

Had you studied singing?

Not one bit, really. They used to force me to go to classes but all we did was sing la-la-la.

Frank tells me you're studying singing with a cantor at a synagogue.

I still go to him, all the time. I guess he teaches how to sing correctly. I got real hoarse when we first started rehearsals with Dweezil. I guess I was kind of also embarrassed just to be singing, hearing my own voice, doing his songs. So, after I became more comfortable, I probably sang correctly. Maybe he did teach me a bunch of things, I don't know.

How did you get to the point of being able to be singing on Dweezil's album when you were fifteen? Did you just walk into the studio the first day you ever opened your mouth?

No, I sang some other stuff for Frank. I've sung on a couple of Frank's albums. Just stupid stuff.

How old were you?

Seven maybe. I was really funny-sounding. I recorded with Dweezil on his second album and the third album, the *Confessions* album, and now we're going to do a whole new album. Hopefully soon I'll be singing solo, so that'll be cool.

Do you play instruments?

Kazoo, but that's about it.

When did you decide you would be a singer?

I was doing nothing whatsoever, I'm still doing nothing whatsoever, I'm still the lazy person that I always probably will be, but it was just something to do. Dweezil wanted me to go down to Joe's Garage and work on some songs with him and then they had a show and I did the show. It was just a couple months ago I realized that maybe I was in the band. So, I never felt like it was my position. I just jumped around up onstage. I hurt myself every single show.

Does the audience like that?

I hope so. That's why I do it. I get a workout, wind up not being able to breathe, close to passing out. I have crazy asthma, so. . . .

Is the asthma related to allergies?

I was a premature baby. My lungs collapsed. I was the baby who every single child-proof lock they had in the house, I was like Houdini. I went through everything. I swallowed every single detergent, everything babies shouldn't do. I'm the guy. Drank ammonia, ate Comet, I was the one. Swallowed mercury, I would do it.

I enjoy it so much running up onstage and playing music, and I think the most amazing thing in the whole world is how — when you're "celebrated" — how the stage gets so huge for just thousands of people, and now everyone's just waiting for big, sparkly flashes like at the downbeats when the snare hits, like BOOM! Like the fireworks, and the big lights, and all that — that's the fun stuff. And then, right afterwards, I don't want to speak to anybody. I am not the person that I am onstage.

So you just love the the physical activity and singing and performing.

Just being a freak. Being completely the opposite of what I really am. I come this close to breaking every bone in my body. It's the most fun you could possibly have. I dance like a freak of nature. To the

Photo: Paul Haggard

point where I am sweating so bad that I cannot breathe. I love it so much. It's like a tribal experience for me. I rue the day anyone ever gave me the position because that bastard has started me on this fuckin' downward spiral where I become a mass of jelly because I'm going to work every single neuron in my body to the point of combustion.

Are you going to stay with being a vocalist?

Yeah, I like it. I think it's fun. I like writing pornographic songs. Just funny, hokey, really diabolical songs that are offensive to everybody's ear. They may be shit to other people, but I get a kick out of them.

So, as you were growing up in this family, was there a point at which you suddenly realized your family was different and that your father was Frank Zappa, who happened to be a controversial character?

No, not really. My friends all realized it. They were the only ones to make comments about it, maybe distasteful in my opinion, but we all laugh about it. Like, for instance, they'll want to go see a movie or something and we always get sent invitations to go somewhere [to previews] and they're like, "Dude, I wanna see that!" I'm like, "Let's wait 'til the thing comes out. We don't need to go to this thing." And then they make jokes because they know I hate it when people bring it up. I don't feel responsible for my last name, because Frank is the only one in the house that is incredibly respected and everything. He's the guy with all the fame and glory and we're just the siblings, and people just look at us as the siblings, and we're not any characters towards them and that's why I hate it.

On the one hand it gets you a certain notoriety, but on the other hand it's the wrong type.

Yeah, well, I'd just rather be a freak and be recognized for being a freak, you know?

Do you like your father's music?

Yeah, I do. I don't like the Synclavier stuff so much. I like the older kind of rocky tunes. I like when he sings, that's basically all it is. When he stopped singing I'm like, "Whoa! Slow down, big guy. Get back to the basics!" But he's having a good time, so whatever.

So the influences that you feel — are you influenced by your father, musically?

I think so. Not like playing or anything, because I don't play anything. My sense of humor, I guess. Growing up in this house has definitely darkened everybody's sense of humor. I gotta tell you, Dweezil and I are the only people that laugh at mass murders or something like that. We get a certain kick out of it, and I don't know if that's normal, but we find shit like that funny sometimes.

Are there particular Frank Zappa songs you like?

I like practically everything on the *Overnite Sensation* and the *Apostrophe* album. Let's see, what else. . . . I like the *Sheik Yerbouti* album. I think that's funny. I like the ***Joe's Garage*** album. I think that stuff's rockin' when he's singing and has everybody else singing, and he's playing guitar. I don't like when he goes off on those wild tangents so much. Sometimes it's funny, but other times it's beyond me. I recognize that's it's musical notes, but I don't know if it's music, really.

People in your age group don't have an easy opportunity to hear Frank Zappa's music, unless they go to the record store and actively seek it out. Are the people that you know that are interested in music aware of what Frank does or has done?

I don't think so. I play them my favorite songs. I play purposely the songs they would be able to recognize because they're so stuck on everything else that's on the radio that they could understand that he's a good musician. They probably don't understand it anyway.

You find that they don't respond with understanding to it or with interest?

Some of them do, but I don't like them talking about it. Occasionally, I'll play them like a song if they're like, "Just play me one of your dad's songs." And I'll play it for them and say, "You like it?" They'll say,"Yeah," but then they want to talk about it with me later on.

You mean ask personal questions?

Yeah. I don't like anybody talking about my family one bit. I will not discuss anything with perfect strangers, or even with friends. I feel like we were raised with a certain advantage because we've like gotten away from all the school kind of stuff, and like I know what I want to do, and I know my abilities and all that kind of stuff.

Do you feel guilty about that?

No. All I know is that when I have these conversations with people my age, they always ask me what I'm gonna do. When I was younger, I felt that they had just no idea, because I got to do whatever I wanted, free speech, we always had a good time. I never was grounded for not doing homework, rarely went to school — I hated school so much. I spent like two years just hanging out here at the house. I barely spoke to anybody because I got so bored of everybody changing and just wanting to go out all the time and being freaks and getting their drug problems and being predictable. Too television-family style.

But you didn't want to be out becoming a druggie or something?

No, that wouldn't have happened anyway. There wasn't any pressure or anything. It was just that people were so boring. They were so predictable. People started copying things I said. I felt like I was changing them in some way. I wanted them to just go down their spiral of death they were stuck in. I know I sound completely pompous and arrogant. I don't mean to be, and I don't feel like I'm being that way, but if I am, kill me now. I never, ever do interviews without completely lying and never giving the right answer. You're the first person I've ever talked to seriously about any of this.

Are there other singers you listen to?

No, no. The only other music I listen to is either just rock music or classical music, but I don't even know the names of the people I'm listening to. All I know is that it's on radio station 105.1 here in Los Angeles. Whenever I have a headache or something, I put that shit on. And I find it enjoyable. However, I have no idea what I'm listening to. I don't understand the way music works one bit. I don't understand the notes. If someone says, "Hit like an *F*," or something like that, I have no idea what they're talking about. If I have to sing a song, if it's a known song, and if they're playing the music, and I don't know the melody, and they want me to sing it, then someone has to sing it first, and then I hear it immediately. Writing a song, it's easy to make up any kind of melody, there's no problems there, but my father thinks that Dweezil and I have the same kind of pitch, perfect pitch, where if you hit a key on the piano then it's like locked in your head, but I have no fuckin' idea what those things are.

You don't know whether you do or do not have perfect pitch?

I think I have good pitch. I mean maybe not singing live, going on tour and everything, but hearing the initial note, I can immediately sing it, whatever it is.

Do you think that listeners today are missing out by the fact that Frank Zappa isn't on the radio every day?

I'm selfish with the whole issue because I've always stayed away from everything in this house. I block out everything. The only thing that always interested me was business and what I was going to do on a daily basis, and people not hearing the music was already taken care of before I was born. They blacklisted him, so he's never on the radio, and whenever he *is* on the radio, it's just that he's been on before, and I just look at it like, "Well, he's on the radio." I kind of wish they wouldn't do it, because just for someone to walk up to me and say, "I heard it on the radio," it's just tedious. I don't want to have to strike up a conversation with these people. It's just more personal to me, because now I really like music, and I just wish that everybody would just leave me alone with it, because I respect my father for what he is. I feel very proud that that's his music, and that if anyone wants to listen to it, it's like such a joke. All the songs are so funny, and it's played with good music and it's just, I don't know.

I feel that everyone who likes my father's music is roughly his age or a little bit younger. And however they're influenced, most of my father's fans I think are the biggest freaks I've ever seen in my entire life. I mean, I do not understand how people will place another human being at like, they're so amazing, like they need to have everything, like autographs. I don't understand that kind of stuff. It makes me laugh. When they get so excited, "Oh my god. You gotta sign this!" They take pictures

and all that kind of stuff, when it's just a human being. All those people walk around talking and breathing, just like you, except you can pay this much money to see what he does, and it's funny and entertainment. My father's fans, when they start wearing that hair and growing that moustache like him, I want to run away from those people.

Those are the sorts of people that scare the shit out of me. Whenever I was little, people always said, "You gotta move fast after a show. Gotta get in the car." I was always afraid of that kind of stuff. To this day, you walk around, and you see these people that have the same hairdo, and they just stand there and their eyes are open so wide. They gape and they gawk at my father, and it's just awkward because he's like my dad, and he's the farthest thing from being someone that I point and stare at.

Do you feel that the humor side of you is one that is being partly influenced by Frank's music, or is that just you?

I think it's just mostly hanging out with my brother, and watching TV, and thinking how stupid things are. I can crack up hysterically. I think I can make myself laugh 24 hours a day. You know how people say when you make the worst jokes, and you're the only one laughing, and everyone else has a straight face? I'm that guy. I'm the guy that makes the jokes.

I don't know other people's sense of humor. I like the songs with the explicit lyrics that my father does have, playing it for my friends and watching their reaction and saying, "Yeah, man. This is my dad." They're like, "No wonder." They either have no sense of humor or some people really think it's funny, and they want to hear more of it. And then they always ask me for a CD, and I say, "Go buy one." That's the way it works.

I entertain myself, and I don't think it's influenced by my father because he's too funny, and he's too to-the-point, and he's too direct, and he can catch a person off-guard and really fuck them over like immediately. He puts them right in their place. If anyone has ever shown a little anger or tried to speak out slanderously towards any of us, he can just, BAM, shut them up immediately, and make them wish they weren't ever born.

Do you like that quality?

Totally. I love doing that. My new thing is just watching people and asking questions that give me knowledge to what they're really like that no one would normally ask and then surprising them by giving them a breakdown. For instance, just asking where they might work, and places they frequent, and guessing where they live, and discussing where they might get gas. And they're like, "Yeah, I do that every day," and it kind of surprises them. Like doing the Sherlock Holmes thing. I think I got that kind of stuff from my dad because just watching him, he's always listening, and he's always direct to the point, and he always asks strange questions and he's always on top of things. So, I try to focus and get on top of things and just kind of surprise people. **Z**

Moon Unit

Moon Unit, Frank's eldest child, now an actress, recalls her own first experience with public adulation when "Valley Girl," which she recorded with her father, became the hit single of his album Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch.

I never had the temperament for learning an instrument. I took harp lessons for a while when I was real little, but I wanted to see results so quickly. It's not that it didn't interest me enough; it's just that I had other interests that were more important.

I always had an interest in language. I have always been fascinated by words, and I like the look of letters all strung together. When I was two years old, I would copy letters from magazines and books, so I taught myself to read, although I had reading disabilities in school and I had to have special tutoring. I think what happened was the subject was not very exciting for me, so I withdrew and looked like I was behind in some areas. Also, I think I was a little bit dyslexic. The stuff they wanted me to talk about was so boring that it looked like I was behind. My memory of it was having to read lots of books about this dinosaur that was near UCLA. So I have this weird association with dinosaurs and the Westwood area.

The thing I most remember in relation to my father was that other kids were not allowed to come over here. I think that other parents thought that we were allowed to curse here, so that if their kids were sent here, they would come back changed. So I went to other people's houses a lot, although kids probably liked it better here because it's like a treehouse. There's always something funny going on. I remember there was a lot of weird stuff around our house — art pieces, album cover photographs, these weird mannequins. Because it didn't look like stuff you'd see at a normal person's house, they thought it was too weird for their kids to be exposed to that. Of course, now I can understand how they felt. But when you're little, you can only think, "Why don't my friends come over and play?"

I was in tenth grade when "Valley Girl" came out. I spent a lot of time back then going to bar mitzvahs. There would be all these kids out there whose lifestyle was so different from mine — this beer-drinking, rebellious, tortured existence, plus a funny way to talk that went along with it. So I would listen and pick up the dialog, the lingo, the information, everything. I was fascinated by it. I would do it around the house and make everybody laugh.

My dad spent so much time away touring that I just wanted to spend some time with him. And when he was home, he would work at night and sleep during the day, and we were up during the day and sleeping at night, so there never was much contact with him except when we passed each other in the hallways on the way to getting a drink of water or a peanut butter sandwich. So one day, I put a note underneath the door of the studio, since that's basically where he lived, and offered my services; that way, I might be able to spend time with him. And that's what happened.

He warned me that he was thinking about having me come downstairs to the studio, but the equipment had broken or something. So I went to sleep, but then in the middle of the night he woke me up and said, "Everything's ready." I went downstairs, and I panicked. I just kept talking. I must have done five or seven tracks, and he edited them together. At the last minute, he said, "I guess we're going to use it for the album." Next thing I knew, my father was away on tour, and I heard "Valley Girl" on the radio on my way to school. Throngs of students greeted me there. It was weird, because people I'd never had any contact with were suddenly interested. That was a great lesson, because you just never know who you're talking to and what's interesting about that person. It's good to pay attention all the time instead of having to wait until somebody finally does something spectacular. It's nice to feel noticed just for existing.

Since my father was on tour, I had the responsibility of doing all the promotion in the States for that album. I enjoyed that. It was fun and exciting. It was nice that people paid attention to me. So it was difficult for me to juggle my grown-up job and going back to the classroom like I was still a kid. I was probably making more money as a 15-year-old kid than the teachers at school. So from the moment

"Valley Girl" came on the radio, I really wasn't a kid anymore, and I left school. Right after that, I did all these talk shows.

But in a way, it was all over before it really began. All I remember now was that I was at the height of puberty and trying to deal with my skin. "Valley Girl" for me was about finding makeup that could cover these blemishes. I became obsessed with trying to make people

"VALLEY GIRL" FOR ME WAS ABOUT FINDING MAKEUP THAT COULD COVER THESE BLEMISHES. I BECAME OBSESSED WITH TRYING TO MAKE PEOPLE KNOW THAT I DIDN'T HAVE ACNE.

know that I didn't have acne. When you're a teenager and you're on camera, that's what you're thinking. You're not thinking you're going to make some really important statement. I didn't even really care about the album at that point. I was just traumatized by the people who sat me in the makeup chairs. That's what that time was about for me.

The funny thing was that I never really paid attention to my father's music. I guess I took it for granted because it was always in the background here. When I think of my father, I think of somebody who kept going. It doesn't matter that he's not on the radio all the time, because that doesn't change what he wants to say or do. He just keeps creating what he wants to create. I think that's a great message for people who don't even know what his music is about — to know that there is a human being on the planet who just keeps going, even in the face of people who don't want him to keep going. There's an option there for people. There's a choice. Z

Diva

At 13, Diva is the youngest of the four Zappa siblings, once did cartwheels on stage during the Broadway the Hard Way tour.

What's your full name?

Diva Thin Muffin Pigeen Zappa.

How do you spell Pigeen?

I don't know. Every time I try to spell it, I end up spelling "pigeon."

Was that the name on your birth certificate?

No. I don't really have a middle name. But I can always change it if I want.

Do you change it a lot?

Yeah. It used to be Banana.

Are you a musician?

Well, I've tried playing the trumpet. I've tried playing the flute. I've tried playing the guitar. I've tried playing piano. I've tried playing baritone sax. I like experimenting, and making a lot of noise, and boring the shit out of everyone.

Why baritone sax?

Because I got one on my birthday. Actually, the reason I got a baritone sax was because I stopped in front of a music store in Germany and started staring at this saxophone. For no apparent reason. I just went, "Oh, my God," and stared at it.

Were you in any way inspired by Lisa on The Simpsons *to take up saxophone?*

Yeah, that too. That's the best show. Mainly I like to watch Bart, but when she plays saxophone it's cool.

How long do you think you'll stay in school?

Until I'm old enough to take the high school equivalency test.

Just like your brothers and sisters?

Actually, I'm going to try to stay in school a bit longer than my brother, just to be smarter than him.

Is there anything you like about school?

Being the most popular for food. I get my lunch delivered to school, big huge lunches, so I say to my friends, "What do you want for lunch?" I can order it, you know. People who don't get some of my food get mad at me and throw food at me. I'm popular if I give them food, but not if I don't. They're, like, eleventh graders and they're throwing oatmeal cookies at me.

I've heard that eventually you want to join the circus.

That's changed. That's my second job.

What's your new plan?

Being a Foley artist.

How did you get interested in that?

I was trying on shoes and listening to the sound they make. They would squeak. That's a great sound. I love these shoes. They were the best-sounding shoes. So my mom and my sister said at pretty much the same time that I should be a Foley artist, and they explained what it was.

Before that, what did you want to do in the circus?

Tumbling. But I have problems with my feet and ankles. No matter what I do, I always hurt them. If I walk, I sprain my ankle in, like, ten seconds.

Have you ever done any music with your father?

He recorded some of my trumpet playing. And he actually sang a song that I made up when I was three years old. It was about a little girl, "Shawna in the Bushwop."

Would you like to record music with him?

No.

Do you think much about the fact that your father is a well-known composer?

Not really.

When did you first become aware that your father is so famous?

I haven't!

He's just a guy down there in the studio with his Synclavier?

He's just a guy working.

Do you like his music?

Some of the songs, like "Catholic Girls," "Dickie's Such an Asshole," "Jesus Thinks You're a Jerk," and "Po-Jama People." The only time I listen to my dad's music is when I'm in my brother's car. I feel stupid listening to my dad's music when my friends are around, because it's so weird and they get bored. All my friends like Guns N' Roses, who suck so much! I HATE THEM! You absolutely have to put that in capital letters.

What's the hardest part about growing up in this family?

I couldn't tell you that, because I don't really have a good memory.

What's the best part?

Having two disgusting brothers. Really disgusting. I want to be a lazy bum, like Ahmet. He plays video games all night long. He's an insomniac until six or seven in the morning, and then he leaves. I want to learn how to do that. He's my idol. Hates me for that. Z

The Simpsons Creator: "Frank is my Elvis"

MATT GROENING IS A BAD BOY WHO MAKES US laugh by revealing things too serious to slip by other than with humor. No wonder, then, that long before he created *The Simpsons*, he was a Frank Zappa fanatic. Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1954, Groening says that no figure from popular culture had such an impact on him. During some miserable years as a highschool outcast, he tracked his hero down whenever and wherever possible, at dozens of performances as far from home as Seattle and Los Angeles. "Frank is my Elvis," he emphasizes. "His example encouraged me, comforted me, made me feel it was okay to go my own way, to not

do things the way the authorities told me to."

Pre-planning and chutzpah actually afforded Matt the chance to meet Frank once in those days of impoverishment. "When I drove down to Los Angeles in 1975 to see the big orchestra," he recalls, "I showed up a day early figuring they'd be rehearsing, and I was right. I walked in, and there was Frank Zappa directing the musicians. I asked if I could sit and listen, and he said fine. That was my first personal encounter.

"I moved to Los Angeles on a hot August night in 1977. My car broke down in the fast lane of the Hollywood Freeway right above Capitol Records at the same time I was listening to a disc jockey on the radio who'd just been fired, who was drunk and ranting about the station on his last show. *That* was my introduction to Los Angeles. Moving here is why *Life in Hell* originated."

Between 1979 and 1985, Groening supported himself as a music journalist writing a weekly column called "Sound (???)" for an underground music tabloid, *The Los Angeles Reader*, about his misadventures trying to get from club to club in a beat-up car. Long before he became Bart Simpson's creator, he intended to be Frank Zappa's biographer. He actually got down 500 pages of notes, supplemented by 1,500 pages of research material. Matt's success with his self-published *Life in Hell* series led to Bart's cameos on *The Tracy Ullman Show* in 1987, and then on December 17, 1989, the premiere of *The Simpsons*, which catapulted Groening into the stratosphere of commercial television. Of necessity, the Zappa project was placed on hold. But not his interest.

"Around 1988," he continue, "I was on KCRW, a local FM public station, playing an hour of Frank Zappa music as a guest on Roger Steffens' program about music of the '60s. In the middle of the show, Frank called in, gracious and grateful and surprised that someone was playing so much of his music on the radio at once. I was delighted. That was basically my real introduction. Then about a year ago, I did an interview for *Interview* magazine, and the guy who talked to me said that Frank Zappa had told him that he liked *The Simpsons*. Through him, Frank invited me to call. I did and we've become friends.

"My goal has always been to entertain part of the audience and annoy equally another part of the audience," he laughs. "When George Bush said in a speech that 'Americans should be more like the Waltons than the Simpsons,' it was great. I love it when they take the bait. Dan Quayle talked about how he's wearing the 'scorn and ridicule' that he receives like a badge of honor. And I thought, 'Scorn and ridicule — yeah, that's what I got to keep remembering to get back to.' Something that Zappa does so well. Not to suffer, but to *offer* your scorn and ridicule. I think as soon as Bart Simpson is able to shave, he'll have a little moustache and goatee just like Frank Zappa's."

When did you first hear of Frank Zappa?

I bought *Freak Out!* at a grocery store, because it was the weirdest looking album that was available of the 12 albums they had in the bin. It was a significant purchase, being a two-record set, and I took it home, and thought it was the ugliest, greatest stuff I'd ever heard.

How old were you?

When was that — '66? So I must have been 12.

What attracted you to it — the look of its being so ugly and strange?

I liked freaks. Just the idea of freaks, and his album was called *Freak Out!*, and it had a dialog balloon on the cover.

Were you freaked out by Frank's record?

No, I was in heaven that somebody would be doing this completely wild stuff. It just sounded like such fun music to be making, and — first song to last — I loved the whole album.

You took it home, and did your parents care?

My parents made comments about how boys are starting to look like girls. And I showed them this, and they certainly couldn't think — with their moustaches and goatees — that Frank's band looked like girls. But that was the cliché of the time.

So your reaction was delight.

Yeah, my friends and I were always looking for the weirdest things out there in music, movies, comic books — whatever we could get our grubby little hands on. And Frank Zappa music fit the bill. My pal Richard Gehr — *not* the movie actor — and I used to console ourselves in gym class by singing the lyrics to Mothers Of Invention songs as we were running punishment laps.

When did your comic books start becoming successful?

1984. It was when I published my first book. In fact, the graphic look of *Life In Hell* was based on the cover of ***Hot Rats***. I liked the idea of making it so you could read it across the room. Most albums were very hard to read, and ***Hot Rats*** was really simple. It was just the title up here, and the name of the band here, and then just one simple picture, and that's what I copied.

So Frank Zappa had some impact on you as a cartoonist?

Definitely his humor. His attitudes about authority, education, politics, culture, music definitely influenced me. Every time Frank Zappa would mention something on an album or mention a composer in an interview, I'd go out and track it down. Zappa was a great tutor. He was a real role model for me. At the time, I thought I was the only person who was influenced by him, but I've met people since. There's a whole generation of people who do funny or weird things who grew up on Zappa's music. His anti-drug stance was confirmed from the beginning, and as a result I never took drugs. It was great to have a hero in the counterculture who wasn't loaded.

I think Zappa is probably one of the greatest composers in history. The wide range of his compositions is staggering. And our culture is so fragmented that there are very few people who can appreciate more than a fraction of what he does. The fans of his rock and roll music don't probably get much of the orchestral stuff, and the people who attend orchestral concerts are not listening to extended guitar solos. I feel very lucky, partially because I was raised on him, and I feel really privileged every time there's something new to listen to.

One of the things that always impressed me about Zappa, besides just the delight with his melodic and rhythmic invention, was that he didn't allow anything to be beyond him — high culture, low culture. I mean, who other than Frank Zappa would have thought of combining Varese with doo-wop? It was so great, and I made a decision fairly consciously after listening to Zappa's music to do the same thing, not let anything be beyond me. That is, it didn't matter how high or how low it was, I was going to try to see what was going on. Most people say, "Oh that area of culture over there is too grubby for me," or, "That area of culture is for rich fops," and I tried not to let that get in the way. I decided that I would just do whatever struck my fancy, and I wanted to work in every medium I could get my hands on from the time I was a kid: movies, any kind of writing. The only reason I haven't done music or never did any is because I got kicked out of my high school jug band for being the worst singer of a bunch of really bad singers. So I realized that music was not where I was going to make my mark.

Here was my hero Frank Zappa — Frank Zappa did all kinds of music and collages and art work and graphics and advertisements, and I thought, "That's what I want to do."

You knew about his business enterprise that he runs out of his home?

Sure, he talked about it in interviews, and as you could tell I was enough of an aficionado to check out everything I could get my hands on. So I saw those guitar ads in old magazines, and I came across the advertisements for United Mutations in old comic books. So as a grownup, I've done comic strips, and a TV show, and TV commercials, and graphics, and illustrations, and journalism, and whatever lends itself to — whatever I can get away with. I always tried pretty much to do funny stuff, so that's definitely influenced by Frank.

I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like he's a very significant person in your development.

AS SOON AS BART SIMPSON IS ABLE TO SHAVE HE'LL HAVE A LITTLE MOUSTACHE AND GOATEE JUST LIKE ZAPPA'S.

I can't think of a cultural figure who's had more of an influence.

Not Bob Dylan or the Beatles or —

Not by a *long* shot. No.

Seriously influential.

Yeah, hey, I even moved to Los Angeles [*laughs*]. What I think that Zappa probably doesn't realize is that there are lots and lots of people out there who have internalized his ideas. Maybe like me they have not gone into music as a career, but have done other things, and still are very appreciative of his work, and very influenced by it.

It's too bad the American population doesn't relate the same way to him and his brilliance. Do you have any thoughts on that?

He's too hard to pigeonhole 'cause he does so many different kinds of things that would fragment his audience. And he doesn't — unlike virtually everything else in pop music — he doesn't present himself as a figure of solemn glamour. He doesn't squint and squat and bite his lower lip when he plays guitar and all that [*laughs*]. Americans are really suspicious of anything cerebral, and Zappa doesn't disguise his intelligence well enough.

In addition to being a man of wide-ranging talent, one amazing thing that always struck me about Zappa is his melodic dimension, which is very overlooked in contemporary music. His melodies are great. Rhythmically, stuff that I didn't even know could be done. And then getting beyond the specifics in his compositions, has there been anybody who's toured as much as Frank Zappa? Think about it. Is there anybody who's composed more than Frank Zappa in popular music? Every so often the talk turns to rock musicians who dabble in classical music, and Zappa's the only one who does it with any seriousness at all. There's a member of the Grateful Dead that funds English composers, but Zappa's the only one [who is actually composing]. Is there anybody who has been more inventive in the wide range of interpretations he gives to his own work over the years? Just look at how prolific — not that quantity means anything, but the incredible quantity combined with the absolutely unique quality of it is just staggering.

Frank doesn't think anything much is going to be remembered in the future. How do you think — if anything is remembered — Frank should be remembered?

Frank is really out of step with the way you're supposed to run your career these days. He's not self-promoting in the conventional way. He's not trying to be liked in everything he does, and I think that he will — that as much as he's tried, he will not be able to mystify the scholars forever. They'll figure out a way of appreciating Zappa's music in the future. I think historically he's assured a great place in music, and he just gives pleasure on such an immediate level that he'll be remembered that way as well. **Z**

Frank Zappa

The Mother Of All Interviews

ACT 1: THE FIRST THIRD DEGREE

By Don Menn

What began last April on the phone with "You've got two hours" turned into four *hours* in person a couple of weeks later, and then several *days* in May, and then more than a *week* in June. And so it went with increasing frequency and duration throughout the summer of '92. By phone and in person with the cassette recorder running and eventually even with video cameras going late into the night, when *The Simpsons* creator Matt Groening asked if he could come along and pose some questions to the man he called "His Elvis." Everyone who works with Frank speaks of how he pushes limits. We lived what they meant. And what an experience. What a joy. What an honor to have been allowed to listen to so much. Here then is the condensed (!) version of the most amazing interviews I've ever been granted by the most brilliant human I have ever faced, in the most open household I've ever entered. ➤

Photo: Steve Schapiro

What impelled you to start writing music?

I liked the way it looked.

Where had you seen it?

Well, everybody has seen sheet music before.

But were you studying it in grade school, or was it just something you picked up as a drummer?

No. In my earliest experience I was doing a lot of drawing, sketching, painting, and that kind of stuff. And I was interested in art, and I always liked the way music looked. And I liked to listen to music, but when I started writing it, I just basically started doing it because I liked the way it looked.

When did you first start writing notes down on paper?

Around 14, I think.

And it was pen on paper?

Yes. It was a C5 Speedball.

Before you even took up guitar?

Yeah. I was still playing snare drum in orchestra.

Did you have a sense of being able to hear what you were putting down?

Absolutely not. I didn't have the faintest fucking idea what it sounded like. I mean, I was so ignorant, I thought that all you did was you got an idea for the way it looked, you drew it, and then you found a musician who could read it — and that's how you did it. I was literally that naïve. Fortunate for me, there weren't any people around who could read music; otherwise I probably would have stopped very early in my career.

Have you kept track of the exact number of works you've done?

No. It's in the hundreds.

Charles Ives used to pile up music that he would bind and put in the barn after a period of time. Do you have the feeling of the same accumulation of works that won't ever be heard?

Yeah. Well, I knew that most of them would never be heard from the day I started writing them. But you can hear them yourself while you're writing them — once you get past the graphic stage, at the point where you know what the symbols actually mean in terms of what it will sound like if you ask somebody to do such and such by drawing this symbol on a piece of paper. Once you understand what the audio result is going to be of that dot that you just drew, then you hear it yourself as a writer.

Many modern composers, though, have given up because they can't get their work heard by other people. Charles Ives once said that the reason he ran an insurance company was because he thought if he'd been thinking of commercial music it would be bad for his family because there would always be conflict about whether his stuff was going to sell or not. He thought it would be bad for him because he'd always be worried about that same question, and ultimately it would therefore be bad music. How have you managed to avoid becoming an insurance executive?

Well, that's probably one of the great mysteries of musical history: how I've been able to afford the luxury of doing what I like to do and earn a living at it. One clue is that I started early, at a time in the business when, if you were doing something odd, you could get in and get a contract — not a lucrative contract — but you could at least get a contract of some sort to make a record. And you could build an audience based on whatever the acceptance would be in that odd thing that you did. Today it would be impossible for anybody to get a contract and do what I did. And after the first contract expired, I began looking for alternate ways to stay in the business without being the victim of the record companies. That finally led me to be my own record company, which is not exactly like being an insurance

PROBABLY ONE OF THE GREAT MYSTERIES OF MUSICAL HISTORY IS HOW I'VE BEEN ABLE TO AFFORD THE LUXURY OF DOING WHAT I LIKE TO DO AND EARN A LIVING AT IT. TODAY IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANYBODY TO GET A CONTRACT AND DO WHAT I DID.

salesman. But let's just say that the difference in economic yield between what I would be having as take-home pay if I was an artist assigned to a label as opposed to being a record company executive — there is no comparison. Because even though I don't sell enormous amounts of records, the amount of cash that you can earn from selling small amounts of records and being your own record company makes all the difference in the world.

Do you have a sense of your audience today being the same as your original one?

You mean, are the people who buy my records the ones who started buying them in 1964-'65?

Yeah, the Mothers Of Invention crowd.

No. I definitely know that it's not, even just referring to the letters that we receive, which are from all age groups. There's little or no communication from anybody that would fit the profile of an early MOI fanatic. There are a few of them still out there, but basically all they liked was that early stuff. And that's all they bought. That was it.

What sort of organizational elements or ideas do you use when you're creating? Do you just sit down and think, "This is going to be a 12-tone section," or, "We're going to improvise this part," or do you just sort of wing it and then bring all your intuitive skills into creating a work?

It depends on what kind of a work it is. When I first started off writing, it was just writing. It was a graphic concept. Then I found out about 12-tone music, and I thought, "Oh, great. Now all I have to do is keep all 12 notes in order and there's no problem, and you don't even have to worry about what it sounds like because the intrinsic value is determined arithmetically by how nicely you've manipulated all these 12 notes and making sure you don't hear note number 1 until number 12 gets its turn." I was doing stuff like that at 17 and 18 years old. I finally got a chance to hear some of it, and I really didn't like the way it sounded, so I stopped doing it.

Twelve-tone music of your own?

Yeah. I mean, I had heard some 12-tone pieces by other composers that I liked, which is one of the reasons why I went in that direction, but as a system it was too limiting for me. I asked myself the basic question: If the intrinsic value of the music depends on your serial pedigree, then who in the fuck is going to know whether it's any good or not? Only the people who sit down with the score and a magnifying glass and find out how nicely you rotated those notes. And that's pretty boring. So I started moving in the direction of what you might call a more haphazard style. That's whatever sounded good to me for whatever reason, whether it was some crashing dissonance or a nice tune with chord changes and a steady beat in the background.

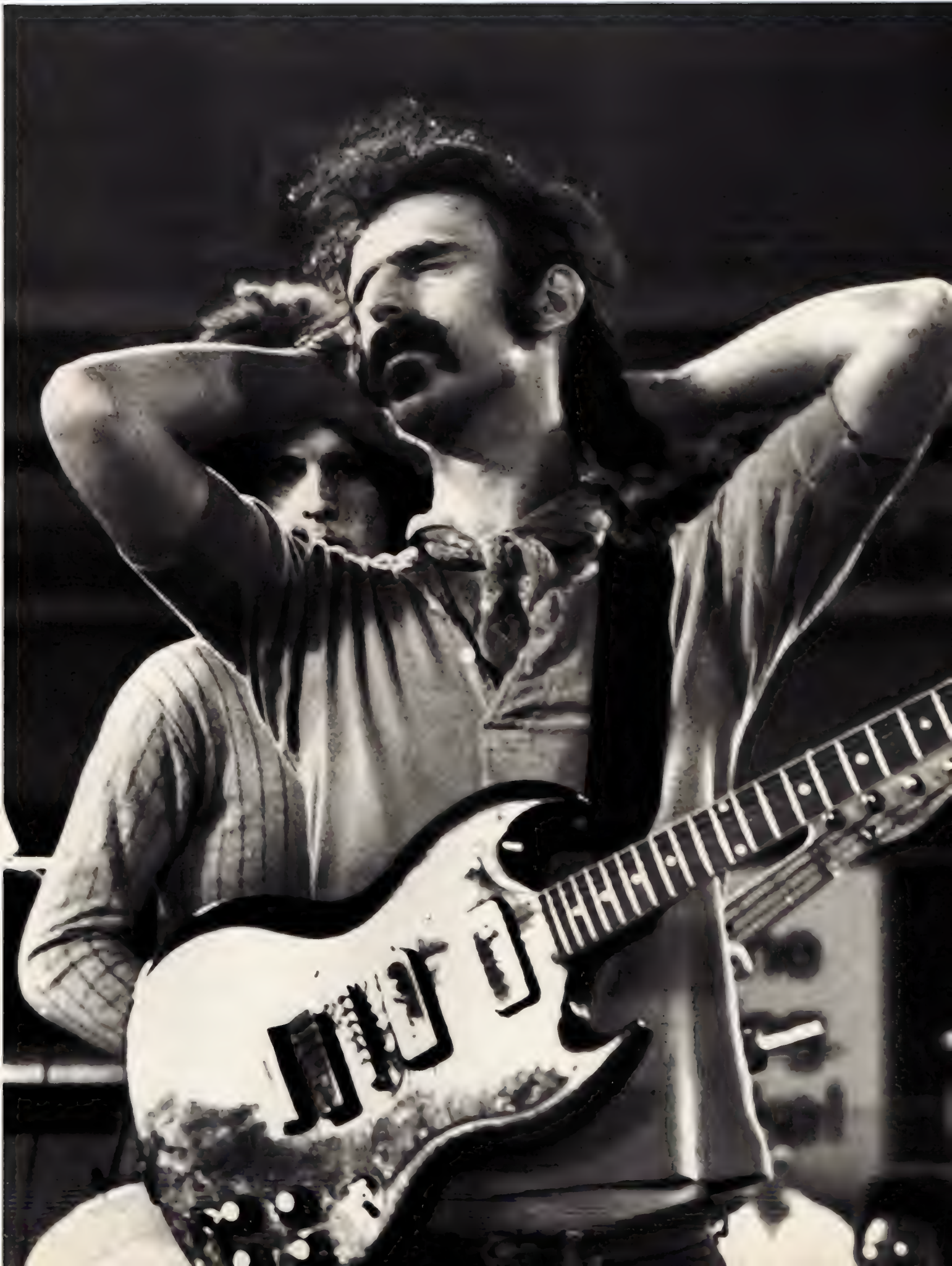
So you're really just interacting with your own work, and whatever musical skills you've built up over the years really are the organizational elements.

It's like being a cook. And if you were a really good cook, and you had a lot of money for really excellent ingredients and really good equipment, then you could cook just about anything. Everything that you need would be some easily identifiable delicacy. But if you don't have all the gear, and you don't have all the finest ingredients, and you don't even own a cookbook, but you still want to eat, and nobody's going to cook it for you, then you better find some other way to improvise that dish. And that's kind of the way the stuff gets put together.

Have you ever tried to specifically imitate an older form like a concerto in a grander sense?

No. I mean, I learned all about those things during the times when I was studying, and it just seemed to me that the reason why those forms

PHOTOS ON PAGES 31, 39, 43, 48, 54 BY JOE SIA.



existed was so that people with limited imaginations could comprehend what the composer was intending to do. A lot of those forms were inflicted on composers by royalty, who insisted that things should be in little compartments like this, this, and this. And if you weren't like that, then it wasn't suitable for the consumption of the king.

I studied music theory and harmony with a man who strongly felt that music should reflect the sounds of any given time, and that theory from Bach and Mozart's time was not very relevant to our time or music. In terms of reflecting modern times and sounds, how far do you feel one should go in sampling, say, jackhammers or women in labor? You've built up a huge catalog. Are these the elements you use?

I have a very good jackhammer recording, which was included in the album that I just finished last night — *Phaze III*. I've got jackhammers in it. There was a beautiful digital recording made during the construction of our new kitchen. I think that my interest in these stems from Varèse's concept of organized sound. But the musical question that I have is, what constitutes organization? In other words, if you have a really good recording of a jackhammer, and you decide to splice it into a really good recording of a woman in labor, have you organized it or not? At what point are you composing and at what point are you collecting?

It's interesting to hear what Stockhausen or Boulez can do with 12-tone music, where there's beauty coming out of something that is potentially a very rigid and dogmatic approach to creating something. That's where the artistic element comes in.

Well, the element of beauty is pretty subjective, too. You can listen to those works and admire the organization, but what you hear is a result of what instruments are playing. And if you like the instruments and the way that they're being played, then the thing that you are listening to is the activated air molecules responding to a set of instructions on paper, which are then executed by the musicians, which then tickle the air molecules, which then tickle the microphone, and you get to hear and make your decision. That same piece played by any other group of instruments or the jackhammer or the woman in labor, even though it might have the same serial pedigree, might not be as fun to listen to.

Did you learn by reading out of books on counterpoint and —

No, I never studied counterpoint. I could never understand it. I hated anything with rules, except for 12-tone, because it was so simple-minded. It was as simple-minded as the idea of getting a pen and some paper and some Higgins ink and just drawing some music. But all the rules of counterpoint and what constitutes good counterpoint, I just couldn't force myself to do that, and I could barely make it through the harmony book, because all the formulas that you learn there sounded so banal. Every time one of the exercises was presented, you would hear how the chords were supposed to resolve. All I could hear was the infliction of normality on my imagination. And I kept wondering why should I pollute my mind with this shit, because if I ever got good at it, I'd be out of business.

When Charles Ives was at Harvard studying harmony he was going crazy the way you're describing, and he wrote home to his father, saying, "This guy wants me to resolve my chords better," and his father wrote him back and said, "Tell your professor some chords just don't want to resolve."

Well, you can tell it to a professor if you have that kind of a relationship with a professor. I mean, I really didn't have professors. The harmony training I got was because I was an unruly senior in high school, and they gave me permission to take some harmony classes at the adjoining junior college. They figured that the reason why I was such a delinquent was because my mind wasn't occupied. So they let me take this course at the junior college while I was a senior. The guy who was teaching it was a guy named Mr. Russell, who was a jazz trumpet player, and I don't think that he enjoyed harmony very much either, but that's what he was teaching. I could have said to him, "Hey, some chords shouldn't resolve." And he would probably say, "Yeah, but you'll get a *D* if you don't resolve them."

***What book did he give you? Was it Walter Piston's* Harmony?**

Yeah, it was Piston.

That's a hard one to stay awake through.

You remember? I hate to read also. It's very difficult for me to digest any kind of information in that way. I'm pretty good at the news magazines. But even with all the digital equipment that I've got, I've almost never cracked a manual on any of it. Basically, I've learned how to work it by just having somebody show me. And then after I've learned the basics, I'll figure out ways to make the system do stuff that was never in the book in the first place.

It's a better way to learn.

Also, in cases of digital equipment, even the best is often accompanied by pretty dismal technical manuals. It's not just that they're boring to read, they're also incomplete. And some of the things that I do with the equipment, the manufacturers never envisioned that such a task would be performed. So even if you've read the book from cover to cover, you'd still have to call the company and say, "Will it do this? If it won't, can you put these two wires together to make it do that?"

How many hours a day do you work? Do you have a regular schedule?

Well, I work as many hours a day as I can physically stand to. The average is about 15 now.

Seven days a week?

Yeah, eight if I can squeeze it in.

Don't you take little vacations?

When I get tired, I go to sleep.

How do you break your work time down? It's not like an hour listening, an hour practicing, an hour revising, an hour writing?

What I do depends on what kind of a job I'm working on. Like, for the last two months, I've been heavily involved in record production, so a record production workday would be a different kind of a workday than one on the Synclavier. Usually, I just get up, get something to eat, go downstairs, and go right to the Sonic Solutions [*Frank's editing system for mastering CDs*]. I'll transfer tapes onto the hard drive and start editing them, equalizing them, and building things. And then, after an album has been constructed, I'll dump it off, reload the hard disk, and keep going. And I usually work at night to do that sort of thing. We have an engineer [Spencer Chrislu] who works from 9:00 in the morning until 7:00 at night, four days a week. My schedule overlaps his. I'll give him instructions on what needs to be mixed, tell him how I want it done, and he'll get the thing set up. By that time, I'll go to sleep for four or five hours and then get up in the afternoon, and he will either have completed the mix or be about ready to put the thing on tape. So I'll sit with him from, say, 4:00 to 7:00 and supervise the mixes. And I take an hour off to eat. And by 8:00, I'm back at the Sonic Solutions. I usually work until about 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning.

Have you ever lost any of your music in a computer crash or a tape meltdown?

Yeah.

How do you protect or store your work?

Well, operating the Sonic Solutions is a little bit like playing with isotopes, because you never know when it's going to do weird things to you. It's a fantastic device, but there are some incredible bugs in the software, and it can do heinous things to you. One of the things that you have to learn to live with is a little sign that pops on the screen every once in a while that says, "Free memory is now less than 250Mb. You may wish to close some files you are not using or reboot in order to clear the system memory." And if you don't do that right away — if you don't stop what you're doing and reboot this thing, which takes about five minutes — what it will do is randomly erase whole files on the hard disk. I don't know why. It's like it's got its own built-in virus that gets you every once in a while.

Have you talked to the manufacturer?

Oh, yeah. We haven't been hired as a beta test site, but I'll guarantee you that if they haven't taken into consideration fixing some of the things that we've experienced here when upgrading their software and their hardware, they've lost a good bet. One of the reasons why I got this thing is because it's possible to do multi-channel edits in it, not just for a stereo device. And in preparation for this project in Germany, we had been doing six-channel mixes of Synclavier stuff and other things, and I needed a device that would

allow me to glue these things together. So I purchased from them this upgraded, multi-channel system, and from day one, it didn't work. They've had their engineers down here fucking around with this thing. It's unbelievable. I still haven't signed the check over to them. I said the day you make this system work, you get the money. [*Ed. Note: The company has since been paid. The unit works.*]

How many Sonic Solutions are there?

I don't know. I hope there's thousands of them, because I want this company to stay in business, because it's a good machine. The things that it can do! I mean, can you imagine a Mac-based system that has software that will allow you to automatically take clicks and crackles and noise out of tape? The de-noising software for this thing — which is something that I didn't buy because it was too expensive — but I wish I would have had something like that when I first started working on the catalog of all the old tapes. All you need is just a little sample of the tape hiss or the room noise or whatever it is that you want to get rid of, like just the merest amount of audio between the paper leader and where the music starts, and the machine will take a snapshot of that noise. And it builds a filter, and you run your music through that filter, and the music stays and the noise goes.

Do you oversee all performances of your orchestral music?

No, I stopped doing that after my experience with the London Symphony Orchestra [*see Nagano interview, p. 8*].

What happened?

Well, I made two albums and there was a live performance, and as a result of the first album coming out, it let some people know that this music existed. Since the time of that album's release, there have been a lot of orchestral performances all over the world, and every time an orchestra calls up for music, they would like to have me come there and be in the concert. And that's impossible. These people can barely afford to rehearse the music. They're going to buy me a plane ticket to go there and listen to what they did [*arches eyebrow in doubt*]?

Kent Nagano says working with you is a wonderful experience because you're so involved with the specific individuals in the orchestra, listening to their ideas, considering them carefully, and then excerpting from them or even changing your own original idea. Have you had equal success with Zubin Mehta's or Pierre Boulez's groups?

Well, the case of working with Zubin was all pretty cut and dried. The Los Angeles Philharmonic management thought that it would be a successful concert. They certainly didn't do it because of musical content. Basically, I had to buy the privilege of having my music performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In order to prepare the parts for the orchestra, I had to pay the copying rate, which in 1971 was somewhere between $7,000 and $10,000. I'll guarantee you I didn't make anything like *that* from the concert. Plus the fact that they wouldn't even let me make a cassette recording of the performance. They told me that if I turned the tape on, I would have to pay the whole orchestra Musicians' Union scale. So they had two rehearsals for all this music, and — you know — it was a festive occasion because there was a rock group onstage and an orchestra playing, and it was being done in a basketball stadium. So there we have it. As far as working with Boulez, the musicians were a little bit different. First of all, there were fewer of them, so you could actually have memorable conversations with them. And a number of them had asked me to write solos for them. One of the brass players was also the head of a brass quintet that worked within Boulez's Ensemble Intercontemperain. And he wanted me to write some brass music. And usually percussionists will come up to me and ask me for music. I never did manage to do any of those things, because they all take time.

***I love* The Perfect Stranger.**

Well, then you're going to love the new release of it, because it's coming out on CD. When it was originally released, Angel pressed 5,000 copies. Digital recording was in its infancy at that time, and I've always been less than enthusiastic about the sound of that first CD. I thought that it didn't come anywhere near what the musicians really sounded like in the room. Last July or so, we got a new Neve console in the studio, which is far cleaner and much better sounding than the Harrison that we had for the last 10 or 12 years. So I remixed it. And those new mixes are on the CD re-release.

You've reissued so many of your albums as CDs; is that to clean up the past?

Well, to the extent that it's feasible. I received some negative comments about some of the ways that I tried to clean up some of the early albums. But now that I have the Sonic Solutions, it's possible to go back to those early Mothers Of Invention albums, take the original mixes, and run them through this device, and for all the purists out there, at some later date, put out a CD version of those original mixes cleaned up in a very professional way.

People like to hold on to the past. Some cling to the notion that vinyl is better and that CDs somehow pollute what music ought to be.

I think that the major drawback to the CD is the tiny size of the artwork. I believe one of the things that people who collect records like is the tactile sensation of handling a well-conceived album package. There can be stuff in it, and if you've got something in your hand, then you can read it, and the pictures look better. That's one drawback about a CD. It's a little, square plastic thing.

My aging eyes have a harder time reading the little inserts than they do the fliers that used to come in the records.

Well, I don't read them. My eyesight has gone to shit, and I'll rarely bother to try squinting at the microtype on those things. Only if I'm absolutely in need of vital information will I reach for my glasses and squint at the package. I like a CD because it's convenient, and to my ear it sounds better than vinyl, because I always hated the squashed dynamic range and the intrusion of all those little crackles.

What was the first performance of your "serious" music?

Actually, the first time I had any of it performed was at Mount St. Mary's College in 1962.

What was the occasion?

I spent $300 and got together a college orchestra, and I put on this little concert. Maybe less than 100 people showed up for it, but the thing was actually taped and broadcast by KPFK. Last year a guy in England, who somehow got a copy, sent me a cassette of it, but I haven't bothered to listen to it.

Are you afraid to?

No. But listen: Anything that takes place in real time needs to be budgeted. Listening requires real time. Spooling material onto your hard disk requires real time, and I'm very conscious about how much time it takes to do certain things, so I limit the recreational listening and try to spend as much time as I can actually making product and doing work.

When you were building your career, then, your focus on so-called "serious music" began much earlier than your becoming a rock and roll star.

By the time I graduated from high school in '58, I still hadn't written any rock and roll songs, although I had a little rock and roll band in my senior year. I didn't write any rock and roll stuff until I was in my twenties. All the music writing that I was doing was either chamber music or orchestral, and none of it ever got played until this concert at Mount St. Mary's.

And did it sound like music is supposed to sound?

Oh, no. It was all oddball, textured weirdo stuff.

You started out that way, and as time went on it got more so.

Yeah. In fact, this concert even involved sounds on tape. I was doing tape editing of electronic music and part of all the pieces had this little cheesoid Wollensak tape recorder in the background pumping out through mono speakers — sounds that were supposed to blend with the acoustic instruments. And there were sections of improvisation and a lot of different experimental techniques.

Varèse wasn't doing that stuff. Who was influencing you at that time?

By that time, I had already heard Stockhausen. I had already heard Boulez. I had heard Pierre Schaeffer. I had a much broader musical horizon than just my first Varèse album, and even owning *that* was a major achievement, living in Lancaster [California] and trying to get ahold of that kind

of stuff. Try to figure *that* out. Well, the Varèse record I actually got when I was in high school in San Diego. But by the time I moved up to Lancaster, I was really isolated. We were poor and albums were expensive, so if you were going to invest that kind of money in some sort of audio artifact, by golly, you were going to listen to it until it was dust. You were going to get your fuckin' money's worth out of it. And so my musical education came from vinyl and large 12-inch-square things that you could actually read on the back. And some of these albums had useful liner notes.

Did you have to pay for those yourself?

Well I got a little allowance, and I saved my allowance up, and then I could buy them, because they were too big to steal. If Stockhausen had been on 45s!

You would have been much more educated sooner.

Sure. If they would have had singles of that type then, because those are the kinds of things you could stuff in your pants or your jacket. I would say maybe 3% of my R&B 45 collection was achieved through illicit means, but the albums not.

I grew up in Kansas City, and I remember hearing Shostakovich when I was a little kid and liking him a lot, but Varèse and Stockhausen just weren't at the record store. It was like trying to find black music on the radio.

All those things can be harmful to a young person's mind. In states like Kansas, you probably get the death penalty for distributing a record like that.

In medieval times, playing a third was verboten because it was considered too beautiful, and people concluded that it therefore came from the devil. And then later playing a tritone was also ruled verboten because it heralded the coming of the devil. And even in the South, when Robert Johnson whanged away on his acoustic guitar, the blues was synonymous with "holding hands with the devil." What is there about music that's considered so scary to people?

You have to remember who's writing about it. The real question is, if a person must write about music, why must he often mention the devil in the same context?

That's what I'm asking you.

It tells you more about the mentality of music writers than it does about music listeners, because the goal of the writer is self-aggrandizement. There's only one reason to write: because you consider yourself to be a writer, and you want people to pay attention to what you wrote. It's the bane of your existence that you must write about somebody else doing something that you can't do. The general summary that I make of most people who are in the world of music criticism — be it for rock and roll or whatever — the important thing is how clever will your column be. A lot of people are forced into the world of rock and roll musical criticism; at least there is such a world to keep them employed, because they sure as fuck couldn't do anything else. So it doesn't surprise me that one often finds references to the devil in any kind of music criticism.

Here's the other thing you have to remember about the early writers on music: The people who could write were writing for an audience that was very limited, because not everyone could read in those days. And those who could were of the church and the nobility, people who certainly had dealings with the devil because they helped to invent the son of a bitch in order to keep the potato-eaters in line!

I'VE EXPERIENCED THINGS LIKE MAJOR RECORD-STORE CHAINS OWNED BY CHRISTIANS WHO REFUSED TO STOCK MY WORK. THEY WOULDN'T EVEN STOCK INSTRUMENTAL ALBUMS. LET ME JUST SAY THAT THERE ISN'T ANYTHING ON ANY OF MY RECORDS THAT ISN'T PILED FOUR INCHES DEEP ON ANY OF THE RAP ALBUMS THAT ARE MAJOR ECONOMIC SUCCESSES.

Kent Nagano says that you and he have had an ongoing discussion about art and entertainment. He says that you believe all art should be entertaining, while he feels art could be something more than entertainment.

Well, I don't really understand people who think of art as an antidote to entertainment, something that should not give you a pleasurable experience. What's wrong with that? I mean, the idea of punitive art — that sounds like something from the East Village.

An "effete snobbism," perhaps?

I don't know whether I would use those kinds of terms, because I happen to think that snobbery is all-pervasive. Every social group has its own special snobbery. You don't have to be a guy with a top hat and a bow tie on to be a snob. You can be snobby and be a truck driver. There's always somebody who doesn't belong to your set. You're always looking for somebody who's either below you or outside your social realm. So, to put something down — describe it as an alien phenomenon, in terms of snobbery, is something that I don't think makes a very good argument. It's a strange idea, to me, to think that the more strenuous the experience is, the more artistic it is — like the ugliest picture is the best art. What do you mean? Who needs that shit? The most interminable, grinding composition, even if it's well conceived, should you be forced to consume it because somebody says it's artistic, or should you consume it because you like it?

So it's not like you would ever subscribe to one of those comments where people feel that artists are somehow better than other people.

Well, I don't think that they are *better.* They're definitely different.

What do you see as different?

I just think that it's a different process to create a piece of music than it is to bounce a check, even though they both may be a little bit creative. Creative people may from time to time bounce checks, but people in Congress very seldom write sonatas.

Why do you think people in Congress look so askance at artists? What's the problem with the message of art?

It's very threatening to them because there's always a chance that an artist will speak his mind, and a politician never will, and there's a certain envy there.

You say the most grinding music shouldn't necessarily have to be endured. How much consideration do you feel the artist should take in presenting or creating for an audience?

You have to have some picture in your mind of what you're doing and who you're doing it for. And the way I do mine is, I have to like it first. If I like it, then it's good, and it's done. And then if somebody else likes it, then that's good, too. And if they don't, that's too bad.

And you feel that over the years you've been able to reach a level whereby you're satisfying your own particular artistic needs and, luckily, at the same time reaching a volume of people who seem to like it?

Well, the biggest difficulty I have is getting the product to market, because there are so many forces aligned against me as an independent.

The tyranny of radio, you mean?

It's not just radio. I mean, I've experienced things like major record-store chains owned by Christians who refused to stock my work. The most recent example, I think, was in *Billboard* about a year or a year and a half ago. This chain from Washington State refused to stock my records. They wouldn't even stock instrumental albums.

Because of your strong language?

Let me just say that there isn't anything on any of my records that isn't piled four inches deep

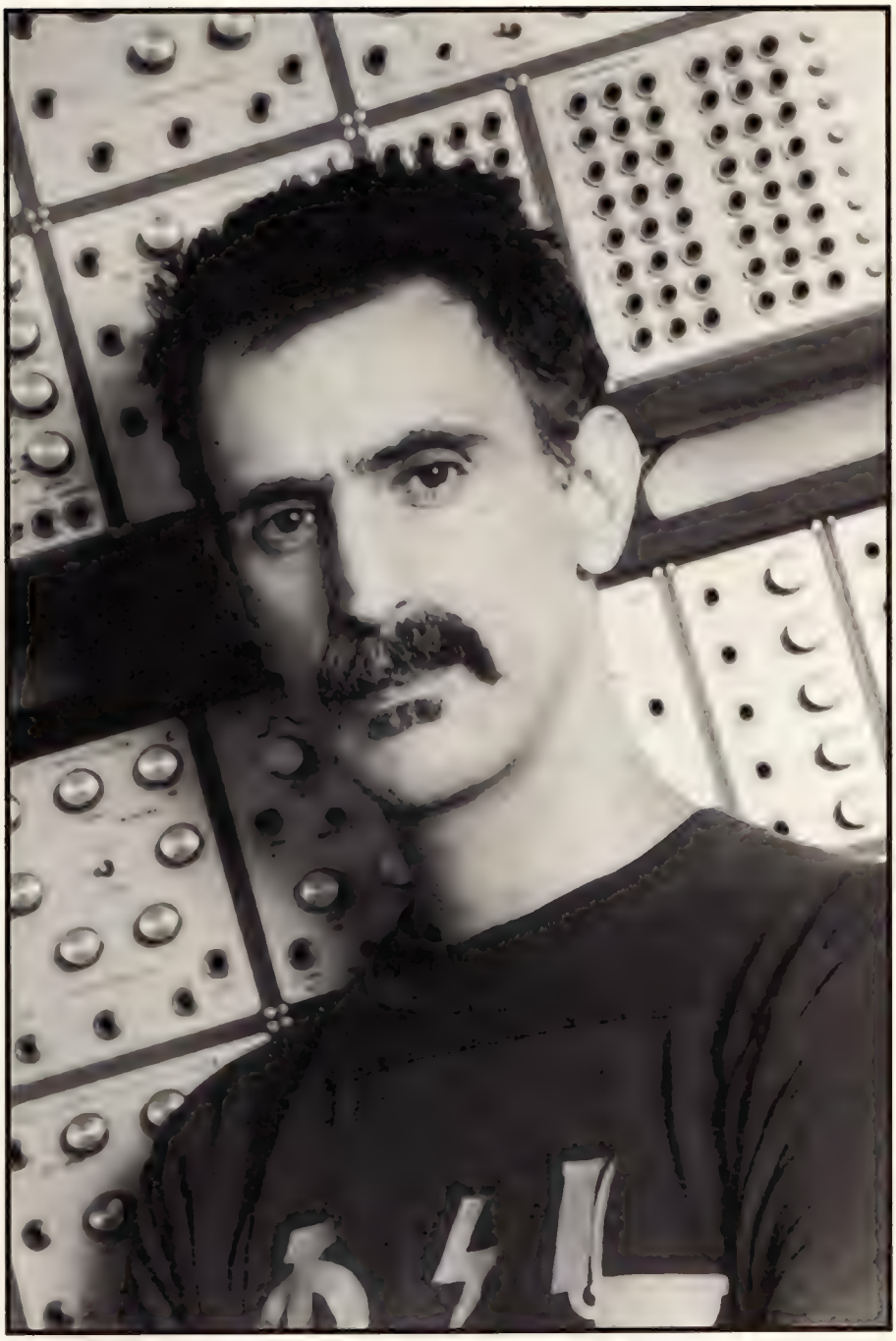
on any of the rap albums that are major economic successes. I mean, there's nothing I've ever said on any of my albums in terms of sexual lyrics that hasn't been surpassed many times over in current rap or dance music. The thing that's threatening, I believe, is the fact that these people know that if they come after me, I won't keep my mouth shut. I'll fight back. I'm not stupid. And one of the hallmarks of contemporary life is what I perceive to be a conspiracy against conscious thought. Every aspect of government at every level has conspired to minimize education and to punish any individual or group that chooses to experience the full benefits of the First Amendment. The contemporary message — the subtext of contemporary life — is keep your fucking mouth shut and be a drone. And government is set up in such a way now with its complete disregard for the value of education that they're going to perpetuate a type of stupidity that makes it possible to have an entire nation of people watching late-night infomercials on TV with their phone-in credit card. How else could such things exist, if it weren't for the disastrous state of education in America?

Is this an historical norm or a worsening trend?

Once you start this particular spiral, it goes only down, because once a couple of generations have gone through this American education mill, these people as adults will never be likely to fund an improvement in the system, because they hated it while they went through it, because basically it ripped their brains out, and now they have children, and their children have to go through it, too. But they don't want to take time out of their busy schedule or spend their precious cash that they were saving up for their recreational vehicle or whatever it is to finance a bond issue to make a school better.

What do you think happened in this country?

Well, two important things, and each one of them has only three letters: One was LSD, a chemical which is capable of turning a hippie into a yuppie, one of the most dangerous chemicals known to mankind. And the other is MBA. When people started taking MBA seriously, that was the beginning of the ruination of the American industrial society. When all decisions are based on an MBA's concept of numerical reality, you're in deep shit, because the only thing that can be judged as real is that which can be proved by a column of figures. And when all aesthetic decisions are turned over to these kinds of people, who use these criteria to make steering decisions for a company with no regard for people and no regard for what the product really is, and the only thing that matters is maximizing your profit, you have a problem. Because you can't have quality then; you cannot have excellence. Quality's expensive. I think most of these people that come from business schools have the desire to make sure everything is cheesy. That's what happens



WITH HIS E-MU MODULAR SYNTHESIZER: I LIKE MUSIC, AND GUITAR JUST HAPPENED TO BE THE INSTRUMENT THAT I PLAY, RATHER THAN PIANO OR ACCORDION OR BUGLE. I WAS NEVER REALLY A GUITAR FETISHIST, AND ALL THE STUFF THAT GOES ALONG WITH THE GUITAR HERO MENTALITY IS ALIEN TO ME.

when you do things that way.

Do you think this problem permeates all establishments?

I think it's specifically an American type of thing.

Do you think we'll succeed in spreading it worldwide?

I'm very upset about what's happening in Russia and in Eastern Europe, with this new changeover to Western-style economies. They are the ones who are the most vulnerable to this kind of chicanery, because all of these so-called experts that are going in there to help them set up their new economies are people from this MBA school of thought. And having visited these areas and seen what great culture they have, it saddens me to see that now it's all going to die. And it's all going to be stopped by the MBA mentality. There's only one thing that's worse than our exploitation by so-called financial experts. That's evangelical missionary work. These two things are the most anti-cultural acts that a nation can take against another nation.

Go in and "fix" them up.

Yeah. On one hand, you have the arrogance of economists who believe that because their column of figures adds up, the infliction of this technique on another culture is something that is going to create a benefit. Well, I think that's going to be proven very wrong in the Eastern Bloc countries.

How quickly?

Within five years. I don't know if it'll revert into a more socialistic system. It's really a nightmare for that part of the world. In the past, the nightmare was the authoritarian nature of communism. I think the statistic in the Soviet Union showed that every third person worked in the KGB. That's a big fuckin' payroll. But it's full employment. They have grown accustomed to a world in which some sort of government agency looks out for every aspect of their social well-being. And all of that has vanished. Now put yourself in their shoes. Suppose you had to change overnight to another system. And every benefit, small as it might be, from the American government was suddenly nonfunctional. It's gone. You'd be totally baffled. You'd be looking for a way to get back to something that gave you a feeling of security and a reason for going to work the next day. The people I've met over there are not just interested in money. Of course they like to own things — they want a better car, a better house, all that kind of normal stuff. But they also have an appreciation for their culture, and they don't want to see it vanish just because there's no way to fund it.

I'll give you an example of what has happened — the most ridiculous one. The revolution in Czechoslovakia was conducted mainly by artists and students. It was an artistic revolution. Under the old system, if you were an artist or something like that, you got a salary, you could work or do your craft. Now this switch-over is starting. Under the new system, there's no cash for any of that. And if you perform in some sort of activity that is language-dependent, you're sunk. In other words, if you're a painter, you can export. If you're a musician, you can export. If you're a dancer, you can export. But if you're an actor or a writer, and you're functioning in the Czech or Hungarian or Russian language, it's hard for you to export. These are the people who caused this revolution in the first place, and they don't get paid anymore! Think they're not sitting around going, "Wait a minute, what the fuck did we just do here?"

Omitting details like that seems to be a continuation of a strange new phenomenon where we have CNN presenting spectacular world events as though they're the football game of the week. We assume everything's hunky-dory when there's some Big Climax like the dismantling of the Berlin Wall or Tiananmen Square, and then we turn on the next World Crisis like the Iraqi war, where we have Bernard Shaw telling us of missiles going overhead, but then in the end we get no body counts or anything, no real information. I don't understand what all this "communication" is about that we're having these days.

Want me to explain it to you?

Yeah.

Okay. Well, thanks to democracy, we now have a freely elected Fascist government in the United States, elected by just plain folks — same people you graduated from high school with.

How big is the work that you're composing for the Frankfurt Festival? Is it several little pieces?

They asked for 20 minutes of music to be divided into four or five sections, but it's not just the one piece, because what I've designed is a whole evening's worth of entertainment, including some older pieces that have been reorchestrated for this particular group, and pieces from the Synclavier. For the concerts, we will be joined onstage by a Canadian dance troupe called La La La Human Steps. They're quite unbelievable. The other thing that's going to be interesting about the presentation is the six-channel P.A. system. I don't think anybody's ever heard anything quite like this in a live situation. It's set up with a stereo pair in the front, a stereo pair in the middle, and a stereo pair in the rear.

That concept is really going to change sound a lot.

Well, it won't, because in order to listen to something in six channels, you need a six-channel source, which means a six-channel mix. Now, who can do that? Any recording artist could do it, if they wanted to do the same kind of setup in their house, if they're working on their album, after they finish their stereo mix, they might want to do a six-channel mix. It can be done, but most of the artists would be too lazy. They're not even curious about it.

Whether or not it becomes popular as a consumer setup, the possibilities seem to open up the whole art of composing beyond simply picking cool notes or neat samples.

Yeah. Considering the sophistication of today's audio consumer, once you get to the point that you like the sound of CDs and vinyl is an aberration, then you're ready to go the next step, which is to have an audio environment rather than just music-minus-tape-hiss. This is never going to be something for people's homes, because most people don't live in places where you can install this without starting a civil war with either your parents or your neighbors. There are already people banging on the walls if you play your hi-fi too loud with two speakers. What the fuck are they going to do if someone installs one of these?

What I would like to see happen with it is to have concert halls designed to accommodate performance of six-channel playback, whether it's a six-channel miked ensemble, or pre-recorded material in six-channel. But to have some kind of an installation where people can come and hear it. It could even be like a coffeehouse-type thing, where you have a conversation while surrounded by a composition. That might be a nice environment. That's feasible. I understand that in Japan, at a Kyoto exposition, they had a multi-channel playback system. But it opens up the possibility of special suites in hotels or, if you can imagine, an audio spa.

The potential of it reminds me of an historic place in Vienna called the Havelka. It's a coffee shop that has been there since Schubert, I guess, and the main entertainment is newspapers on a stick, and a little classical music in the background, and every known form of coffee and Viennese crullers — little pastry things with some powdered sugar sprinkled on top. This place is so bizarre, because there's not that much conversation, just people reading newspapers on a stick. It's owned by this old woman named Mrs. Havelka, who's been running it since birth, I think, and the walls are covered with things from famous composers and authors who paid their bill by writing "graphic currency." Vienna's funny that way. Apparently Wagner stayed at the Hotel Imperial one time, and to pay his bill he handed over some pages from *Parsifal* that are still on the wall in the coffeeshop.

The guy who was the first promoter for the first Mothers Of Invention concert in Vienna was this guy named Joachim Lieben — otherwise known as Joey Love, the guy with the perpetual ski tan. Joey was not only the only rock and roll promoter in town, he was also on the board of directors of [music publisher] Universal Editions. For me, going to Vienna was like [*dramatically*] "12-Tone Country." A music store in Vienna means there are scores in the window, and I was out of my mind! You can walk down the street, and suddenly here's a little shop with Webern scores in the window. So Joey was the guy who took us over there, because he was split between two worlds. He was bringing in rock groups but at the same time promoting classical concerts,

and on the board of this modern music publishing concern.

Will he be involved in the concerts in September?

No, the promoter in September — this group has been in existence for ten years, and the guy who did the most to organize and put them on the map was Karsten Witt. He had a real talent for organization and helped them make a deal to get an industrial building on the outskirts of Frankfurt, which is their permanent laboratory. It's fantastic what they've done to it: triple-walled rehearsal studios, a climate-controlled basement full of percussion equipment of every description, a massive collection of really good professional equipment, individual rehearsal halls, a small auditorium for press conferences and recitals on the ground floor. The third-floor offices are all modern office equipment and communications, and the top floor is a concert hall with a 20-foot ceiling with windows that look out over Frankfurt on the top of this industrial building out in cement-plant country, and that's their facility. Anyway, Karsten helped them put this together. When the project first began Karsten was about to turn over the reins to Andreas Möhler-Zebhauzer, who's the boss now, because Karsten got the job of being the director of the Vienna Festvolker. So when he went to Vienna part of his concert schedule for 1992 was to bring in the Ensemble with my project.

A building like that must be very expensive. They must be well funded.

Well, they share the building with a group called the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, which is really their orchestra but it's all young non-professionals. Part of the money comes from the city of Frankfurt, and the rest of it comes from their concert revenues. They have records, but they're all on small, obscure European labels.

They must be really pulling people in to survive on concert revenues.

If they do 2,000 people a night, it's a major turnout. I think for modern music, even though it's supported more in Europe than it is here, still if you get more than 500 people at a concert you're doing something special, because there are just too many other things to attract the concert dollar. But this year's budget for the Frankfurt Festival, which is the overall umbrella in which this event is occurring, I think is $6.7 million for the month. And for that amount they have to mount all these concerts for Cage, Stockhausen, my stuff, and I think Kagel. It's a week for each composer, and it coincides with Cage's 80th birthday.

There's no American city that would ever raise six million dollars for something like this.

Yeah, and you also have to realize that during this same period of time many other German cities have their own fucking festival going on with equal budgets. Cologne's probably got something just as big and just as elaborate. Berlin has something simultaneously. In fact, one of the orchestras in Berlin is playing my music at the same time. Also during that week in Frankfurt, there's two orchestras which will be playing two of my pieces — one on Monday and one on Friday. And then the Ensemble dates are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Tell me more about the six-channel playback system.

The orchestra will be seated in social groups, and each group will have a minimum of four mikes on it, and some will have six, so that these four- or six-channel matrices can all be superimposed on each other within the six-channel matrix. Then there will be a character, probably dressed as a religious figure, who will be carrying a special device which I've concocted. It's a six-channel fishpole. Now imagine a small hula hoop, and imagine six small but very high-quality microphones attached to this hoop, and the hoop is on the end of this stick, and *it's* dressed up to look like a religious artifact. The religious figure will be followed by a small religious slave who will carry his religious wire so it doesn't get tangled. And when — let's call him The Bishop — The Bishop approaches you with the hoop, what the house mixer is going to do is cross-fade between a static position — like from the social groups — to just the output of the six-channel hoop. Let's say you are a trumpet player, and you're playing a solo, and here comes The Bishop. What the audience hears is a trumpet directly overhead as The Bishop approaches you. But as he takes the hoop and puts it past the bell in the trumpet and over your head, the audience hears a trumpet going through the floor. Do you see the relationship between the six mikes on the hoop and the six speakers in the auditorium? The net audio result would be that all sorts of space games can be played by relocating the hoop. You can conceive how it's experienced in the audience. It's a pretty simple-minded solution to this problem, but I don't think anybody's ever done this before.

The series of concerts will be a gratifying honor. Are you looking forward to it, or dreading it?

Well, both, because this is probably the most complicated concert music project I've ever been involved in. The logistics of it are staggering. And there are budgetary constraints. I mean if this was rock and roll, and you were going to go out to do all this stuff, you know you could sell a lot of seats, and you could make a lot of money, and you could do a lot of things if you took that money and turned it back into the production. But when you're dealing with a 2,500-seat hall and this kind of music, the economic structure is not the same.

Do you have to pay for a lot of this?

No. As a matter of fact, for the first time in history, ladies and gentlemen, they have paid me. And they've paid me enough money that I have been able to work on this thing for about a year. But that's just for delivering to them notes on paper. The problems arise when you start trying to figure out how to make the thing sound the way it's supposed to sound in these environments and pick it up and move it to two other locations. Andreas Möhler-Zebhauser [*see page 12*], the director of the Ensemble, has been going around Europe trying to find the extra financing to make all this happen. And if he does not succeed in doing that, we'll have to find some kind of a Plan B.

Also, we've been talking with Neve, and although we don't have a contract with them to do this, I think that they're going to try to help me get a board with some sort of automation attachment that will allow me to do these cross-fades from the static social groups to the Bishop. Not only is it going to be recorded in a studio, but we're also planning on recording the live concerts.

How much impact do daily events, small or large, have on your work as an artist?

In terms of the news or in terms of what happens around the house?

The birth of children, the news, whatever.

Well, they both have an impact. If I see something that really pisses me off, there's no way I can shake it off. It'll either keep me from working altogether or send me in a blind rage to the Synclavier. Some things are just so depressing that I can't work at all. I'll just go to sleep. I'll just have to sleep it off, because it's like having a mountain of bad vibes dumped on you.

Some artists claim that there should be a separation between themselves and those sort of things, as though they can remove themselves from whatever they're doing.

Who are these artists? What an important question to ask before you buy their album!

What sort of sociological "lemming effect" do you see in the rise of the guitar superhero?

I don't have a speech I make about this, but my observation is that guitar playing as currently understood has more to do with sports than it does to do with music. It's an Olympic-challenge type of situation. The challenges are in the realm of speed, redundancy, choreography, and grooming.

I remember an historical theory stating that the end of any century usually was marked by terrific declines in everything from arts to politics. As we careen toward the year 2000, do you think there's some sort of planetary "trigger" that goes off and creates bizarre phenomena like guitar superheroes who just play as fast as they possibly can?

I don't think that the guitar superhero mentality is an evil unto itself. We have to go back to the real evil, the MBA mentality, because this phenomenon could not proliferate if it weren't being manufactured, widely distributed, and supported by enormous industrial forces. Otherwise it would be just laughable. You can't look at something like that, which on its face is truly laughable, and laugh at it when so many people with

so much money are taking it so seriously. And that's the message that goes out to the next generation of "guitar heroes." In a way, it's like the message in those ads which you'll see if you ever watch television during the daytime to find out what women get to see for commercials. In the middle of the *Sally Jessie Raphael* show, there are all these commercials for lawyers who will be happy to sue your employer because you felt stress. Have you ever seen these things? One commercial shows a happy couple — you — on the bow of a yacht clinking champagne glasses together because you had the wisdom and fortitude to dial this number and sue your employer because you experienced stress.

In the "Guitar Clone" article you did for* Guitar Player*, you stated that the entire population, even guitar players, "has been transmuted into a reasonably well-groomed, odor-free consumer amoeba that is kept alive only to service manufacturers and lives its life by the motto: biggest, fastest, loudest, mostest, and best." What a motto. What's a motto that you wish we could substitute?

I think we should avoid mottos. Mottos are what you're left with when society becomes freeze-dried. If you can reduce everything to a motto, you're in deep shit. I mean, that's the message. We are in deep shit. And it's getting deeper, and nobody wants to bail it.

How do we get out of this, Mr. Frank?

I don't think we're getting out. I think that we must adapt. The human organism is fairly flexible, and the United States is being transformed into something truly hideous, and those who wish to continue to live here and function as Americans are going to have to find some way to adapt. You're going to have to find a way to drink foul water, breathe foul air, eat semi-poisonous and/or non-foods, and find some way to keep a job so that you can spend money to experience the thrill of these things.

Sounds pretty exciting.

Well, that's evolution. We have evolved to this. Look, every senior citizen who's asking, "What's going to happen to my benefits?" can think back to the days when they told little Sonny, "Be a lawyer; it's a good job," because these are the people who went out and did their job and found ways to make their job pay better by creating more laws that were even more baffling, that caused the average person to need them. So when you have a society that is addicted to lawyers, addicted to credit, addicted to stupidity, with nowhere to go and nobody to sell it to, what do you call that? I mean, is that *Apocalypse Now* or what?

Lorin Hollander says that some of your music is painfully beautiful. I don't know if you hear it that way. And even in your instrumental music, where we don't have the words going on, you put humor in the liner notes. Is that coming out of this political feeling you have, or is it an organizational element whereby you're creating a contrast between something very moving and something very funny, or is it to keep these sort of emotions at a distance, or am I intellectualizing too much?

I think you're intellectualizing too much. You can reduce it to this — you can ask this question: Is it possible to laugh while fucking? I think yes.

What about the issue of the ethics of sampling? At what point does the line become gray?

I think that, aesthetically, a case can be made in both directions. If there was really some superbly artistic reason for taking massive chunks of James Brown albums, or whatever it is that you're stealing to create this unique new collage that required a wholesale chunk of James Brown texture in order for you to do your art, then I think James Brown ought to get paid, and James Brown's record company, which actually owns the copyright on the master or the chunk of the master that's used, they ought to get paid. And if you can't do your art without stealing chunks of James Brown, and you don't want to pay James Brown, then find some other art to do.

How long has it been since you've played guitar?

A long time.

Do you fiddle anymore?

Well, I keep one sitting by my chair in the studio, and when there's some boring mechanical process going on, I'll pick it up and plink a few notes on it, but I don't really play it. I just touch it every once in a while.

All the years that you were considered a great guitar player, were you trying to be a guitar hero, or were you using it merely as a musical tool?

I like music, and the guitar just happened to be the instrument that I play, rather than piano or accordion or bugle. I was never really a guitar fetishist, and all the stuff that goes along with the guitar-hero mentality is alien to me.

Do you think you've lost your skills, aside from having your calluses turn to marshmallows?

I don't think I can play anymore. I don't have any motivation to play. I don't have any backing group that would allow me to do the kinds of things that I do. They're begging me to do something in this show in Germany, and that's one of the things that I dread, because I think the audience will probably be expecting it, too. And it's difficult to go onstage with just a little stick in your hand and no guitar after 25 or 30 years of doing it the other way. So that's going to be hard. It depends on what you're trying to do on the guitar. I mean, if you know how to play chords, it's not likely that you're going to forget all the chords. But improvising a solo comes from places in your brain or someplace else in your body that can be adversely affected. And I don't feel right playing guitar. It's an uncomfortable feeling.

How do you view yourself in the world of music? Do you have a sense of place vis-à-vis other serious composers?

Well, yes: basically, that I don't belong [*laughs*].

There's nobody like you. Nobody does anything like what you do.

That's true, so therefore . . . what? Three dots. . . .

How did that happen?

My taste was just different.

From early childhood on.

Yeah.

And you had the good sense to listen to yourself rather than to other people. That's a unique characteristic and must somehow be tied into being a successful artist.

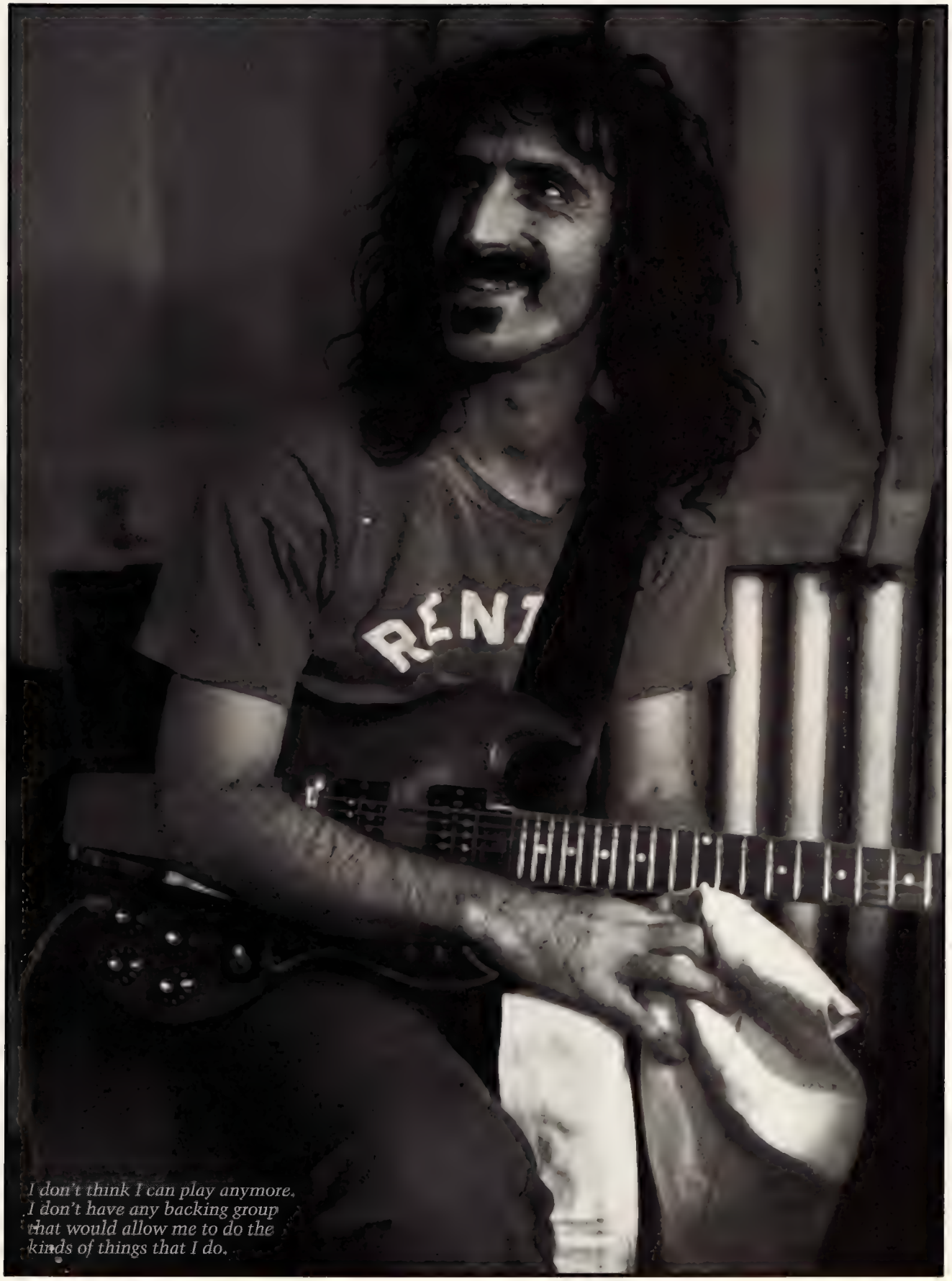
Today the most successful artists *never* listen to themselves. They always listen to the managers of the corporations that keep them going. Because, in today's world, if you afford yourself the luxury of following your own artistic whims, you'll be out of a contract. You'll no longer have that tennis shoe endorsement or that soft drink endorsement. You'll be a bad person. You'll be forgotten. You'll be stacked up with Flock Of Seagulls and name the next one. You'll be on the rack with those guys. Everybody is so well-behaved today.

Do you think that there might be people sitting out there working as night clerks in motels writing symphonies that will never be heard? Or have even those people finally given up?

I think there are still probably a few left. And I only say that because of the mathematical probabilities that, evil as the current system is, it's not so efficient that it can kill us all. There are a few stragglers out there. You'll never hear what they do, though. That's the problem. Unless you can hear music by reading it off paper.

You don't think a scenario might unfold in the future like in the past, when Felix Mendelssohn found a ream of paper with notes on it, which turned out to be the works of Bach, who had been forgotten for the prior hundred years? Do you think there's any future hope for excavation of these motel music writers?

No, because it's tied to economics. Look at it mechanically. In a society where the economic system sets aside money to finance cultural activities, maybe. In a society that is based purely on profit versus cost, the mathematical probabilities of anything like that happening, *ever*, are so small as to be not worth considering. Let me contrast just this one other thing. One of the best-kept secrets in American life is the attendance annually at museums by the American people. More people go to museums every year than attend football and baseball combined. It's the best-kept secret in this country. The desire of the average person to consume something other than shit is there, but the people do not control the hand that turns the crank that redirects the river of shit in their direction. They have no control over these guys who have made the decision that this is what they want, and this is what they'll get. And they'll get more of it, and the flow will



I don't think I can play anymore. I don't have any backing group that would allow me to do the kinds of things that I do.

never stop. But I don't think that the American species is so debased that they have given up on all hope of a cultural life. It's just that they have no concept of how to achieve it or really understand why it's worth preserving. And that's what's so sad about museum attendance, because stuff in a museum is dead. It's cultural necrophilia. A museum should exist, yeah; you should go and see the past, you should see that treasured little thing — whatever it is. But that's like the mentality of the guy who wanted to shut down the patent office in the early 1900s because it was the official government point of view that everything had already been invented.

There's a part of me that wants to believe that somehow there will be a great sweeping away of all these forces of ignorance and evil, and these people who long for something that uplifts their spirit or entertains their eye and ear will get what they want.

Well, right now, the desire to consume that stuff — the *need* — is being fulfilled on a local and regional and even domestic level by people recording things on little home studios for their own amusement and the amusement of their friends. That's the equivalent of the guy in the motel writing the symphony. It's the guy with his little Fostex making his own demos even though he's never going to get a contract. And it's like the revolution in home video. People are shooting what they want to see — basically, themselves fucking.

I keep thinking of your comment about attendance at museums, and I keep wondering about the contempt that somebody must hold for the American public, of what they would or wouldn't enjoy hearing, or seeing, or doing.

It's more than just contempt. The people who make these decisions don't even care about the public at all. It's beyond contempt for them. They have a special agenda, anything status quo, which means maintaining the current administration. They'll put up with whatever they can handle in Congress, but the idea is to subjugate the population. All ideas have to be subjugated, behavior has to be subjugated. And the problem is if it were an ingenious policy and somebody found an ingenious way to inflict the policy, then everything might be sort of okay. But what you've got is a really stupid policy with an ingenious way of inflicting it. They're much better at the methodology of inflicting suppression than they are in coming up with a creative policy that is worth inflicting on the public.

What my naïveté prevents me from understanding is how this mechanism evolved, and what the breeding process is that gives us the officials or bureaucrats or politicians that enforce and perpetuate it.

For one thing, there was this entity created by Ronald Reagan called the Department of Domestic Diplomacy. If you look in the Iran-Contra manual, you'll find out.

This is not a joke.

It's not a joke. The guy that he put in charge of running this thing had no address, no phone number. You couldn't call the Washington directory and get the number of the Department of Domestic Diplomacy. The guy who ran it was Otto Reich, who used to be the head of disinformation for the CIA. You should get the Iran-Contra thing and look it up in the table of contents. I had heard a rumor about this thing. I couldn't believe that it was real. I went on C-SPAN and talked about it. And I started getting phone calls from people saying, "Yeah, it is real." And one guy faxed me the actual pages from the Iran-Contra book that had the whole story of this thing in there. And as far as I know, it was never disbanded. The thing still exists, unless there's been a miracle. It's just like Cointelpro under Nixon. Cointelpro was what they were trying to hide with Watergate. It wasn't just breaking into the Democratic headquarters. What they're trying to cover up is the fact that Nixon had decided to create a secret police. There was no legal authority to spy on U.S. citizens. He felt he had enemies everywhere, so he created a program called Cointelpro. It was all the domestic spying on political groups, people he perceived as enemies. And since it couldn't exist under law, it had to be financed by a slush fund.

He went out to investors?

There were plenty of investors for Nixon. For example, a lot of people don't realize that Marcos gave him 15 million dollars. If you've got a right-wing fascist idea, there's plenty of people who will give you money to pull it off.

Was this going to operate somehow under Nixon or under the CIA, or the FBI?

I think that it was a stand-alone operation, but under the jurisdiction of the Justice Department. It was so corrupt, and it was such an affront to democracy, and most people don't realize it already happened. The other thing that happened under Reagan is that in the early part of his administration, he signed a presidential order, a presidential finding, a directive that finally gave the CIA legal permission to spy on U.S. citizens.

Is this still in effect?

Yes. It was done as part of the war on drugs.

That's scary. How do you get so informed on this?

People send me stuff. I look at every different news source that I can find, and read between the lines, and the rest of the time you watch C-SPAN, and every news story that comes on raises a question. The first question is, why is that story on and not something else? And then what about the spin? You know, when they tell you a story, how are they spin-doctoring it?

Tell me about your phone call to Edgard Varèse.

I had received for my 15th birthday $5, and — although I had never made a long-distance call before — I thought that maybe for $5 I could make a call to that mysterious place Greenwich Village, to call Varèse. And my mother said okay. And he wasn't there. He was in Brussels getting the "Poem Electronique" ready for the World's Fair. But I did speak with his wife. And I've spoken to her a couple of times on the phone.

Did you learn anything that was important to you, other than just to make the call?

Well, what are you really going to learn? What's a composer's wife going to tell you? She was a nice lady. She was kind to take the call. They lived on Sullivan Street in the Village. It was a nice place. It had a red lacquer door. When we moved to New York in '67, we had this miserable fucking apartment on Thompson street, but it was a block away from Varèse's house. He was already dead by that time, but I used to walk by there and see that little red door and just try to imagine what it would be like to be trapped in that apartment not writing music for 25 years.

You mentioned once that you were sometimes influenced by sidemen. How much do people really influence you?

If you find out that there is a person who can play a certain instrument, and do things on that instrument that are unique, you're always tempted to write something specifically for that individual.

Like with Vinnie Colaiuta?

He's a perfect example. He's a truly unique individual.

In his rhythmic ability to hear more than a one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four?

Yeah. And to play it with style and attitude. Attitude is a prime commodity in music today, but this is one of the guys who invented attitude.

Where did the title Barking Pumpkin come from?

That's an easy one. Gail used to smoke. She quit. But she used to smoke Marlboros, and she coughed all the time. And so I had always referred to her as my pumpkin, and so at that point she was a barking pumpkin.

Since you said you haven't played guitar in so long, my impression of you over the last many years is of an extraordinarily serious composer locked away late at night typing away on a Synclavier. Do you know any other composers who have done as much continuous work as you on a Synclavier?

I don't know too many composers who can afford them. There's a guy named Herb Pilhoffer in Minneapolis who has a setup twice as big as mine, mainly because he's doing these commercial things and some film scoring. I've never met him, but my assistant [Todd Yvega] used to work for him and told me about his setup. There may be some Synclavier setups in some universities with some students using them. But as far as composers of any kind of repute that have this system or anything like it, I don't think so. Because it's not just a stand-alone system. You can't just buy one and then do it, because in order to

reproduce it and capture what it does, you virtually need to plug it into a recording studio.

You mentioned once that your Synclavier was unable to stop and play from any given point. Is that still a problem, or did they fix it?

That particular thing was making it play from any given point from the music-printing page. And they are no longer supporting their music-printing software. I think they fired everybody who wrote their music-printing software. The company is basically going the direction of selling the system to the world of film and television. They use the sound-effects inserting device. And although it wasn't originally touted as a musical instrument and a composer's tool, I think that their bread is being buttered by the entertainment industry now.

So you won't get this issue taken care of.

Not unless I go out and hire the guy who wrote the music software and tell him to come in and fix this. We're using [Coda] Finale software. It's about $600, runs on a Mac, is MIDI-interfaceable, and graphically it mops the floor with the Synclavier's music printing. It's probably the most complicated piece of musical software I've ever seen. I mean, I own it, but I still can't work it. Ali Askin, the copyist for the Ensemble, wanted to use it in order to prepare the scores for Frankfurt, so I let him go out and buy a copy. He learned to work it in about a week. How, I'll never know, because there are three incredibly dense, tiny-print manuals on this thing that are absolutely baffling.

The idea was that if I got a copy of the software, too, then I could do a MIDI dump by using this new feature on the Synclavier. I can take my sequences, transfer them via the MIDI port into Finale, and then send him floppies of the Synclavier stuff so he can manipulate the pictorial data in Germany. I had to buy the software just to set up this communication link with him. We installed it, but I've never even attempted to use it. The first thing I did was have my assistant, Todd Yvega, who is a real computer whiz, try to figure out how the damn thing worked. And when I saw him pulling his hair out, I said, "This is not for me. I'll get too frustrated." Let me give credit where credit is due. Todd is really Mr. Synclavier.

The other guy whom I regard as a major talent in and a major asset in preparing the work that I'm doing now is the new recording engineer, Spence Chrislu, because Bob Stone is no longer here. And this other guy who makes sure that everything works is Dave "The Tree Hugger" Dondorf. So between Dave, Spence, Todd, and myself, when we all get together and all the equipment is working, we can rule the world! The days on which everybody's here and all the equipment is working are so few and far between, I think the world is still very safe.

When computer technology reaches a point where people can start using their finger or a pen to write things, would you switch back from typing in notes into writing in notes again, only now on computer screens?

Well, I have to go back to dots on paper because it seems that since I cannot operate Finale, and there are some strategic limitations to the Synclavier software, in order to prepare the composition for the Ensemble Modern, the easiest way to make some of this stuff happen is to just go back to dots. For this, I had to get special glasses made, because the normal ones that I use were the focal length between my head and the CRT, and are therefore useless. It's the hunched-over-monk work position on a table, so I had to get these mondo-magnifiers.

I've been reading about a rising interest in country music at the same time that there's a rising interest in rap. Are there racist components at work here, or is this all media hype?

Anything that appears in multiple locations on fronts of magazines which are basically owned or affiliated with record companies and broadcasters, I think you can count on smelling a rat.

You mentioned once in an interview that one of the sad things for young people is that they no longer have venues in which to hear improvisation.

Yeah. And since most of the best improvisation was never photographed or videotaped, if they're raised in a world where the interest of a musical nature is tied only to the question of, "Is there a video of it?" kids will never get a chance to hear what it was. If it is no longer fashionable to listen to music, if your peer group only watches music, and if you're old-fashioned and you listen to music, then you could lose status by being a mere listener. The trend today is to be a music-viewer-slash-dance-participant.

Are we seeing an era in which even the phenomenon of listening to music will give way to some other fad like the Duncan yo-yo men and ballroom dancers and vaudevillian jugglers?

That even sounds like a kind demise.

You think it will be more brutal?

Since music exists now at the whim of corporate sponsorship, the temptation to create musical divisions at corporations who prey upon these consumers is going to be very strong. In other words, the trend I see is towards a Coca-Cola concert division, a Pepsi-Cola concert division, a Nike concert division, a you-name-it concert division, where the type of music required to help sell their product is nurtured in a test tube and then foisted onto the consumer world with the whole control, cooperation, and financial backing of the manufacturer who stands to benefit from it.

Do you see the same scary, depressing future for metropolitan orchestras as well? They already play Beethoven's* Fifth *every season.

What could be more scary than their existence right now? What's more scary than being in that orchestra where you never do anything other than that? Except die.

How many orchestras do you know that are able to even expand their repertoire? Kent Nagano was the first conductor that I ever heard of trying to do something semi-strange.

Well, Kent is also a unique individual. This is a chance-taking, weirdo, outside guy. He's not a normal orchestral conductor. He's being very successful, more successful in Europe than here, because that's where the action is. Take for example this project that I'm doing. There's no way it could ever be done in the United States. No group would ever come to me and offer me the amount of money that would enable me to work on it for a year.

How is your next album coming along?

I finally finished disc one of the *Civilization: Phaze III* album, which is something that I've been promising for years and years. Most likely, it's going to be a double CD. But the thing that's unique about this album is, it combines the people inside the piano that were on *Lumpy Gravy*, except that on *Lumpy Gravy* there was just this smidgen of what was actually recorded with them. I've had these tapes since 1967 and have extensively edited all this semi-random conversation together into little scenes that form the bridges between the Synclavier pieces that are the bulk of the album. And it's pretty astonishing.

How long were they in that piano?

Twenty years.

And then you let them out?

Well, you can't make them stay, and you don't want them in there unless they're being entertaining. And so it started to become a trendy thing to do at this particular studio. Like the receptionist out there would go, "They're in there in the piano again, ha ha ha." And the next thing you know, she's one of the people in the piano. So the cast of characters that wandered in and out of the piano covered everybody from Motorhead and [bass guitarist] Roy Estrada to the sister of the guy who owned the recording studio to Monica the Albanian receptionist to bunches of other people whose names I can't even remember. They just happened to be there, and I said, "Do you want to go in the piano?" And they said, "Yes."

Sounds like a microcosm of America once again. Did you listen to all of the hours of this stuff?

Absolutely. And I've been listening to it since 1967. This is a process of creating stylized poetry using digital editing techniques. You know how hard it is to edit any material that's ambient using a razor blade? You can't make it sound right. But thanks to the Sonic Solutions, you can do these cross-fade edits where the resonance of the piano does not cut off and the people who were not even in the piano on the same day would talk to each other or answer each other back in some strange conversation. Without Sonic Solutions, I couldn't have put this thing together. It was truly a project that had to wait for technology to catch up and make it possible. So not only do we have these smooth transitions from different days and different groups of people inside this piano, but they

also blend seamlessly into the Synclavier pieces. So the piano overhang, which would be the result of voices setting the strings in motion, will be overhanging the start of the Synclavier piece, and the last chord of a piece will be ringing off into the piano as they come in talking again.

Were the Synclavier sections composed after listening to all this older material, or had you been sketching them out all along?

You've got to understand what the Synclavier process is like, as opposed to writing for any other medium. Imagine being a sculptor, okay? And imagine making your own mountain and then going to the mountain periodically and hauling your own hunks of marble back to the shop so that you can whack away on them. Sculpture is a subtractive medium, and you start off with more than you wind up with. So the analogy here is that the raw material that I'm working with is whatever is in my imagination versus what samples are at my disposal. And building the mountain is building your collection of samples. After you've recorded the individual instrument, or jackhammer, or whatever it's going to be — you can't deploy it into a composition unless it's been captured. You know, it needs a start mark and an end mark put on it, and all this really drudgerous bookkeeping kind of stuff, which Todd does for me. So I've got far more samples on tape now than I even have access to in the Synclavier, just because it takes months to prepare the raw material. And as the new samples come on-line, they are deployed into compositions which have been worked on over periods of years. In other words, the day I start a certain composition, I have one set of samples, and it makes the composition sound a certain way. But as new sounds come along, and they're plugged into the composition, the notes may be the same, but the whole sound of the piece changes.

And so you're often rewriting material you wrote long ago. At least the notes on paper now have a different timbre.

It's not just that. I mean, when you get to hear other possibilities, you're influenced by the very process. For example, when I first bought the Synclavier, it wasn't even a sampling machine, and I started writing things for it that just used the FM synthesis. The main charm with a Synclavier at that time was the power of its sequencer and the fact that you could have multi-tracks and things colliding with each other. So some of the pieces that were started even in the pre-sampling days on the Synclavier have gone through permutations over the years and still haven't been released yet. About a month ago, we finished something that I've been working on for 10 years; it's 24 minutes long. It sounds like an orchestra piece, but it's an orchestra like you never heard before. You couldn't get an orchestra like this. Not only do you have all the normal orchestral-sounding instruments — the piano, percussion, and the rest of that stuff — but it has every known kind of synthesizer noise built into it, plus vocal sound effects and car sounds and all this stuff organized into basically a diatonic composition. I've been working on this thing for years and years and years, and every time a new sample comes along, it would go into this thing. That's going to be the centerpiece of the second disc. Timbre is *determined* by your samples, which is determined by your ability to purchase the samples or make them from scratch.

YOU'VE GOT TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE SYNCLAVIER PROCESS IS LIKE. IMAGINE BEING A SCULPTOR. AND IMAGINE MAKING YOUR OWN MOUNTAIN AND THEN GOING TO THE MOUNTAIN PERIODICALLY AND HAULING YOUR OWN HUNKS OF MARBLE BACK TO THE SHOP. BUILDING THE MOUNTAIN IS BUILDING YOUR COLLECTION OF SAMPLES.

But the only real limitation on the machine is an "S" with two lines through it. Everything that it can do costs way too much money, since there are so few of them around, the price per pound of what it does is still way up there. In order to stay in business, the company had to make a decision to move it away from being a composer's tool to more of a sound-effects film-business-type tool. And so they've stopped supporting the music software. They've had a lot of software updates for all the editing aspects of it, but none for maybe three years on the music-printing software. They fired the guy who wrote the printing software, so that's kind of frozen in time. The software contract is $2,500 a year, just to stay current with what they're doing. It's mostly to expedite "housekeeping," et cetera.

The one thing that I am kind of proud of is that I never took any foundation grant money to do any of this stuff. It was all financed from record sales. But as the record sales go down, so does the amount of money that I can turn around and reinvest into the hardware — which has a price that's steadily rising — and it squeezes me into a weird kind of position, because it keeps me constantly in debt to the bank to pay off loans in advance to buy the equipment that's in that room. So the more "specialized" the music that you can make, the smaller the audience gets. So it's like going down a black hole, where it'll eventually reach a singularity, and — *poof* — there it is. Gail does all the business. She takes care of all the stuff for the bank. She arranges for all the loans to get the equipment. The house is her project; that's her composition.

How do you catalog your samples? Is it broken down by car-bumpers-falling-off noises versus. . . .

That would be under "Industrial." It's completely broken down. Not only that, but I think we've got tens of thousands of samples by now, and you memorize their names. There's an eight-digit computer name for each of these things. I can sit there and watch the thing, and I can see the name of the sample, and I know what it sounds like. I know every one of those little bastards. I know how far it will travel on the keyboard all by itself. I know this stuff inside and out. To be able to write music for that kind of sound universe offers some major opportunities if you have the time to do all the typing to manipulate it properly. And there's never enough time at one sitting to finish something, because the more you get into it, the more you understand it could sound a lot better if it only had this nu-

ance or that nuance. And every nuance you want to add takes hours, which then go into days which go into weeks, and on and on.

And every one of those nuances needs to be defined — amplitude for each note, whether the note has vibrato or whether it's going to bend to the next note, all that stuff. All that has to be typed in as data. And it has to be transferred to tape, then it has to be mixed.

How do you ever know when something is done?

When I get so fucking sick of it, I go, "It's done!"

Does this ever feel like torture to you?

Oh, yeah. There are some intermediate stages that are definitely not fun.

But it's a habit you can't kick?

Yeah, that probably would be accurate. I don't think I would even want to.

As your skills increase, do you notice your music changing?

I don't know how to answer that. That's pretty subjective.

What do you feel are your greatest weaknesses?

I just can't do normal stuff.

Like?

Arithmetic.

You're talking about life skills.

Yeah, and their equivalent in music. I can't do counterpoint. I can't write traditional harmony, which would mean I would be virtually unemployable. Without me employing myself, I wouldn't have a job.

I've listened to some of your orchestral stuff and thought, "Gee, I notice he's getting rid of these sort of things I learned about in college."

I never had to get rid of them!

What are your greatest strengths?

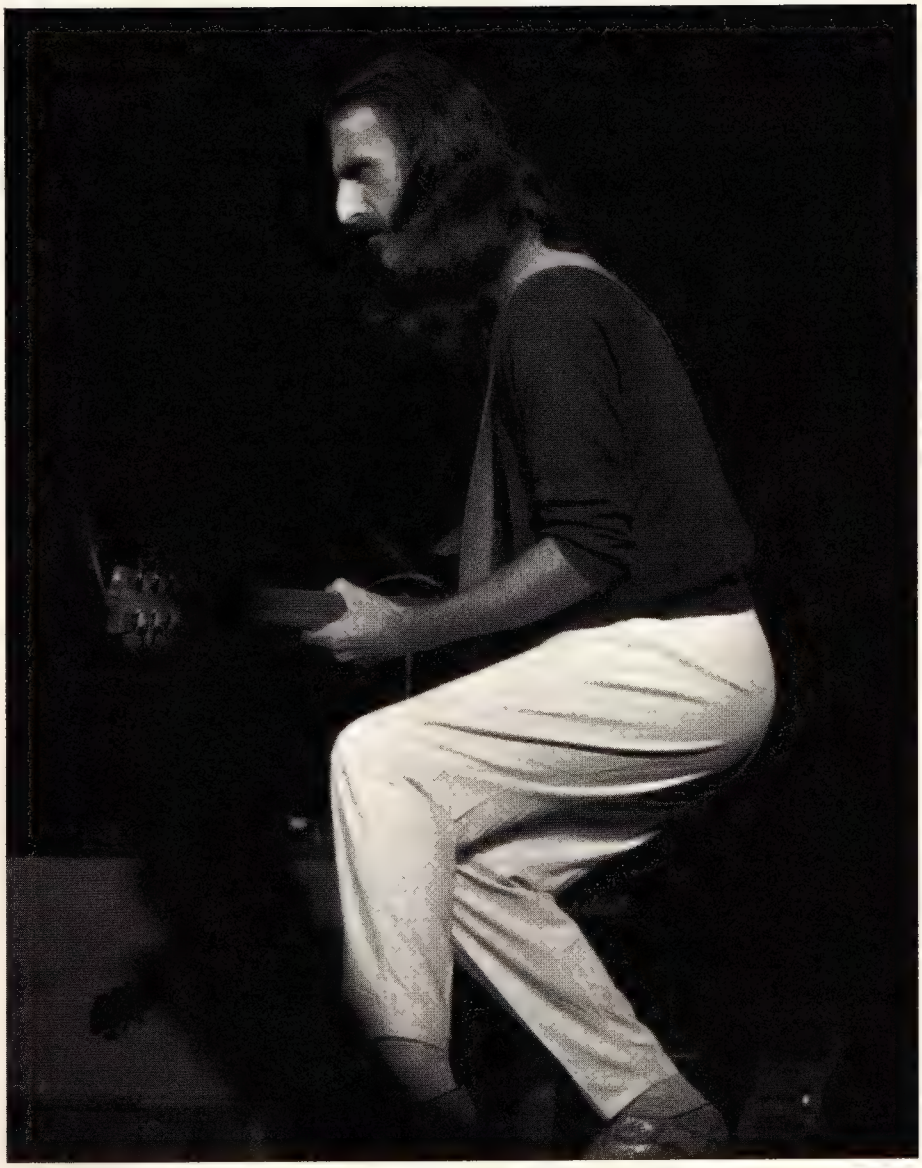
Probably the greatest strength that I have is a sense of humor.

Your humor seems to show a real concern for the plight of human beings in a declining culture.

Well, I don't think in terms of things like "the plight of human beings," because they certainly haven't cared about my fucking plight, so why should I care about theirs? However, I think that the label of "misanthrope" is probably not right for me, and "misogynist" is not right either. The thing that interests me is the behavior. That's always been a fascinating thing to me. Whether an interest in behavior constitutes a "concern for a plight," that's subjective. But I think that it's even scientifically worthwhile to make some notes about behavior as observed. And this can lead you to speculation as to why such behavior occurs.

You once said you never got a good studio solo. Do you even try studio solos anymore?

No. I'll make one exception. I think that maybe "Sleep Dirt," for all its imperfections, is a pretty nice little solo. I've done a few guitar samples, but I probably should do more, because one



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of the things that would be a stimulating addition to the sample library would be a set of my guitar notes that would allow the machine to play all the shit I can't do with my fingers, and still make it kind of sound like my guitar. I'll get around to that one day.

Whatever happened to your Jimi Hendrix Miami guitar?

I gave it to Dweezil.

Is it playable?

Oh, yeah. He had it refurbished. Fender spiffed the thing back up.

Is there any type of music you hate?

There are certain things that I'm not fond of, but hate takes a lot of energy. I'm not really fond of commercial cowboy music or contemporary country — the "Slick Willie" type of shit. And lounge music I don't enjoy.

At one time weren't you a lounge musician?

Oh yeah, I had to do that, and at the end of it I put my guitar in the case and stuck it behind the sofa and didn't touch it I guess for a year. It was nauseating.

Do you see the world of sound as just this palette to draw from, or were there things about lounge music that actually made you run screaming out of the room?

When you're adopting or adapting a style in order to tell a story, everything's fair game. You have to have the right setting to the lyric. If it's a lounge setting, then there it goes. If it's a slick country setting, then there it goes. The important thing at that point is to tell the story. But I don't think of the world of musical style as the world of sound. That's another topic altogether. That's another planet. The world of sound is back to the jackhammers and women in labor.

You quoted Stockhausen's "lazy dogmas of impossibility."

Yeah. He had presented the score of the woodwind quintet of "Zeitmasse" to some musicians who looked at all these mondo tuplets and proclaimed the piece unplayable. Then he responded that they were creating "the lazy dogmas of impossibility." And one of the most accurate performances of "Zeitmasse" that I know of was a cassette that somebody gave me of a group from San Francisco that had played at a chamber music concert. The guy who conducts the San Francisco Chamber Symphony invited me up there to conduct Varèse in '83. He gave me a cassette of a performance that he had conducted of "Zeitmasse," and it was really good. The first Columbia recording was full of mistakes.

But I'll tell you something: This Ensemble Modern could play that shit with their eyes closed. In this incarnation of the group, there's an American guy living in Italy who is playing the tuba, a Swiss character, a couple of Canadians, and an Australian, but, of course, being based in Frankfurt, it's mostly German musicians. The total instrumentation for my piece was about 25. They had to add some outside musicians because they don't normally have a mandolin player. The Ensemble Modern [*normally about 14 members*] has been augmented by an extra percussionist, so we have three percussion, a guitar, mandolin, two harps (one doubling piano), piano doubling celesta, five woodwinds, five strings, and seven brass. The group has been around for about 10 years, and they own themselves. They have an elected three-musician board of directors which handles the aesthetic decisions on what they're going to play and when they're going to play it. In order to be in the group, you have to be voted in every year. If you fuck up, you're out.

No tenure.

No tenure. And there's a waiting list of people who would like to be in this group. They do about 100 concerts a year all over the world, and it's a full-time job. These guys don't go out and do jingle dates, and none of them are making a lot of money from doing this. They all seem to be living pretty close to the economic borderline. About half of them go to work on bikes — rain, sleet, or snow.

BUT I DON'T THINK OF THE WORLD OF MUSICAL STYLE AS THE WORLD OF SOUND. THAT'S ANOTHER TOPIC ALTOGETHER. THAT'S ANOTHER PLANET. THE WORLD OF SOUND IS BACK TO THE JACKHAMMERS AND WOMEN IN LABOR.

Total commitment.

And can they play! It's unbelievable.

Are they young, old, or mixed?

Mostly young.

How did you hear of this group?

I was contacted by a guy named Henning Lohner, who had a documentary about me that's never been on the air in the U.S., but it's been on in Europe. It's all about the serious-type stuff. Henning knew a guy named Dr. Dieter Rexroth, who runs the Frankfurt Festival and was the director of the Hindemith Institute in Frankfurt. Dr. Rexroth although he doesn't speak English, is a big fan of my stuff, and Henning suggested to him that they invite me to do something in this festival. So they sent me an economic proposal that was insufficient and I thanked them and said no. What they wanted was impossible. So about four months go by, and I get another call, and they say they really want me to be involved in this festival, and would I meet with these guys from the Ensemble Modern, then they sent me some CDs that the group had made for some German label. And the thing that astonished me was that it was just a great album. They had recorded the music of Kurt Weill. The selections were all obscure, unique things, some of them with vocals, and the recording was great, the performance was great.

At any rate, finally we came to an agreement, and I definitely had the idea that these people really wanted to do this. I didn't realize the decision was not just coming from the director of the festival; the musicians voted to invest their time and energy in this project. The *musicians themselves* desired to do this. And so you know under those circumstances that, whatever you write, they're going to play the fuck out of it. So the next thing that happened was, I said let's construct the piece while you're here; why don't you come to Los Angeles for two weeks, and I'll rehearse with the group just like I would rehearse with a rock and roll band. And that's what happened: We did rehearsals, we recorded some improvisations, we did mass samples with the whole group and individual samples — things that never came out of notation in any textbook, things that you could never write down on paper.

How long did they stay?

For the entire two weeks. Now here's the other thing: During all this time none of them got paid anything!

Sounds like your type of guys.

There was nothing they wouldn't try. If we were after a particular musical result, they were all for it. The classic example was they are so sound-texture-oriented that they would try anything, even abuse their instruments. The French horn players were sitting there scraping the bells of their horns across the floor, and those things are very expensive. If I had the finest Hollywood musicians, at no price could I have gotten those sounds.

And they certainly wouldn't have been that committed.

The other great noise was — there are two people in this group who play didgeridus. One of them is the woman from Australia who is also the oboe player. And one afternoon, I imagined this awful sound that could be created if one were to take a didgeridu and play it into a partially filled coffee pot. And I asked her whether she would do it. She said yes, and let me say, it is truly nauseating. I was laughing so much I had to leave the room.

That sounds like a great group — fun to work with.

They're so serious. The kind of laughs that they have are German laughs. You know what I mean? It's like there's a different kind of humor involved here. There's a different perspective on things. You can laugh, but not too much. Anyway, you know what happens if you take a little straw and blow it into a half-empty Coke bottle?

Imagine a straw with a diameter of about an inch-and-a-half or two inches. It already has a wooden resonance to it. You know the noise that comes out of a didgeridu, that kind of circular-breathing-type low droning noise? If you plunged anything that would make that noise into a liquid, you get the tone and the bubbles at the same time. It's pretty nauseating, but fascinating.

How much do you feature it in the new piece? Is it just a little punctuation that comes and goes, or is it the whole theme?

She's going to have a solo.

Does she know that yet?

Oh, sure. They all — since they were using up their vacation time to do this project — she had to leave the day before the last day, and so I had to make sure I got all of her individual samples out of the way. I said goodbye to her and thanked her very much. And the next night, we were having our final jam session of the season. And she showed up again. She cancelled her flight, because she was having so much fun. And at the end of the thing, she said, "In all my musical life, I have never had as much fun as these two weeks working on this stuff." And I was stunned, because it was really such hard work and so many hours.

You allowed them to be so creative, and you asked them to draw upon all their skills and to expand their own borders in ways that they probably don't get a chance to do.

Well, for one thing, I wanted to find out whether they could improvise. Most of the musicians in that part of the musical world don't. And for the first time in their lives, these people got a chance to play a solo and they went from sheer terror to ecstasy.

You gave them all these opportunities. You have a reputation for being a mentor of the young and/or fosterer of unknown people's careers. How did that happen?

I think that it probably has something to do with fractals. The more I think about fractals, the more the whole idea of fractals relates closely to what I do.

How so?

Well, if you're trying to divine order out of chaos, that's a little bit presumptuous, but then on the other hand so is the concept of chaos. So I would say that the fractal theory falls in the cracks between those two attitudes. And rhythmically, if you're dividing the universe into twos and threes, which is basically what happens with all polyrhythmic subdivisions, you are to some degree missing the boat — the fractal boat. If you can think of rhythm as an extension of the fractal universe instead of even subdivisions of twos and threes grouped into elevens and thirteens or whatever, if you can think of microsecond relationships as being valid components of polyrhythms, then you're getting closer to the way I view things. And if you can, transferring that into the anthropological domain, how I wind up being, in your words, a mentor to these kinds of people, it just seems that the odds are in my favor, that if I keep doing what I'm doing, we will meet.

You made the comment that listeners accept polyrhythms in your music and African drum music with much greater ease than they do dissonance. Why is it that harmony seems to linger around so much?

Rap music may bring an end to that. Think about it. What is so preciously consonant about spoken words? It used to be, in order to have something acceptable as broadcast material or even listenable material, it had to be saturated with consonance. And although rap music is not dealing with harmonic combinations of major and minor seconds, it is certainly dealing in dissonance.

That's true. You've done a lot with spoken material, too, such as that thing with Steve Vai tracking your voice.

Oh, on "Dangerous Kitchen"? Yeah, where he wrote down the — well, I'd have to call it a scat because there's no other word for it. It's on that and "Jazz Discharge Party Hats." He transcribed it and then learned it on the guitar and then played it on the record. But I think that the other, better example of spoken material would be something like "Dumb All Over."

Why is it okay to hear really strange rhythms but not to hear really strange harmonies?

Well, arguing the other position, people *do* assimilate really strange harmonies when they are accompanied by the appropriate image.

Do you mean like in horror-movie music when the maniacal slasher is about to come?

Exactly.

It's got to be visually triggered.

Well, the society has been so saturated with visual data, and the audio that goes along with those pictures stays in your tissue, kind of like dioxin. And you hear the slasher music, you know what slasher texture is, you know slasher harmony [*laughs*]. And if you hear anything that sounds like slasher harmony, and there's no slasher, you're still going to feel the slasher.

Then the question becomes, have the visual media people created the proper image to go with the sound?

Well, if I were going to do a slasher movie, I could be a lot scarier than the shit that they stick in there. I thought that the pinnacle, the thing that everybody has gone for since it was established as a slasher norm, was the *squeak squeak squeak* from *Psycho*. Most film scoring for tense moments runs the gamut from *squeak squeak squeak* to the filter opening up on the Minimoog on the low note. Not too much in between there.

How do you think Schubert would feel knowing that the* Unfinished Symphony *is the Smurfs' theme?

Well, how do you think that the people in America would feel if they knew where the Smurfs came from? They were an advertising device for British Petroleum. When we went to Holland for the first time with the band with Mark and Howard in '70 or '71, the whole place was riddled with fuckin' Smurfs advertising BP. And the joke in the band was, "Smurf mee" because on the billboards that's what they said. "Smurf me" spelled "m-e-e." I don't know what it means. But to go from that to what we now have as a family of Smurfs with their own personalities. According to Ahmet, who saw this spectacle on television, he witnessed an interview with a guy who was one of the Smurf voices, taking himself so seriously that it beggared description. I mean, he did about a five-minute routine on this guy.

There's our cultural hero. And again it gets me back thinking of guitar heroes, and why they are gunslingers. In your touring days with rock bands, did you see guys out there playing air guitar?

Sure.

What is that, and how come girls don't do it?

Well, because their tits get in the way, for one thing — same reason why you don't see that many girl guitar players unless they're handling it at a low altitude. But I think it's probably because girls are too smart to play air guitar. If ever there was something that the women's liberation movement could use to prove the inferiority of the male species, it's the extremely low number of women who play air guitar.

We haven't talked about your business. As I understand it, you and Gail handle everything.

In the house, we have three offices. We've got one upstairs in the bedroom where I do all the liner notes and that kind of word-processing stuff. Gail has an office, and then there's another office just as you come in the gate that we use for all the phone transactions and that kind of stuff. We have a lab, we have a studio, we have an editing facility, three vaults for tape and film. That's all right here where we live. There's two other buildings in the San Fernando Valley. One of them is Joe's Garage, which is a rehearsal facility. And then there's our warehouse, where all the equipment and stuff comes out of. Gail runs all that.

Why did you decide to handle all these things yourselves?

Well, I would say there's a certain hose-job factor in there, but in reality it's just good business sense.

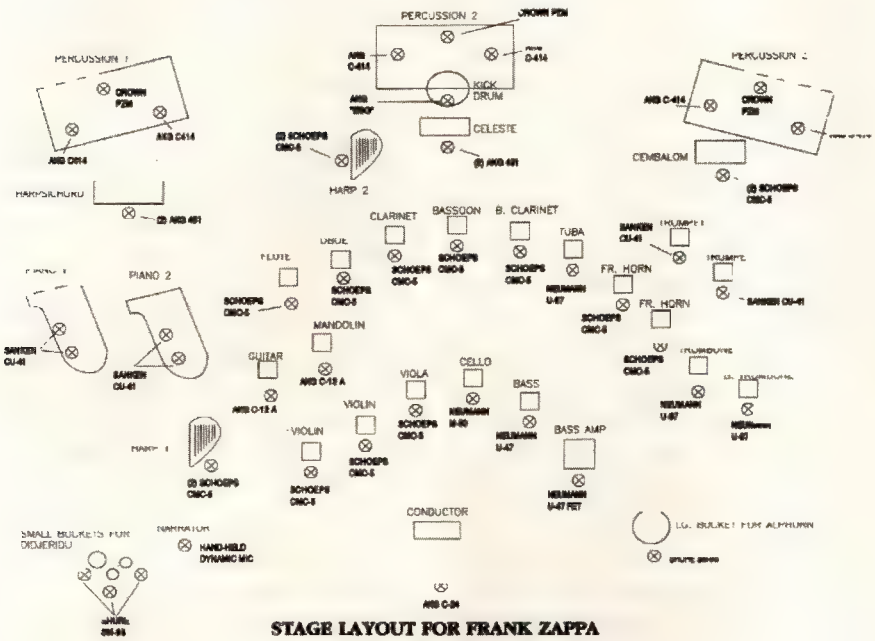
What's in that huge vault downstairs?

Since the early '70s, I've collected every interview, every performance clip, everything that was done around the world that I could get a copy of. Then there's all the rest of the footage from *Baby Snakes*, the accounts of every documentary that was done in Europe and everyplace else, and then there's videotape — every format from two-inch to digital video and all stops in between. Plus all the masters, all the road tapes, and all of the 1/4" tapes from *Cucamonga*. The audio tapes go back to '55.

So early on you were very careful about keeping things and keeping them in order.

Well, being a pack rat is something, but keeping

ZAPPA STAGING IN GERMANY WITH THE ENSEMBLE MODERN



STAGE LAYOUT FOR FRANK ZAPPA
"THE YELLOW SHARK"
REV. 3, 8/18/92

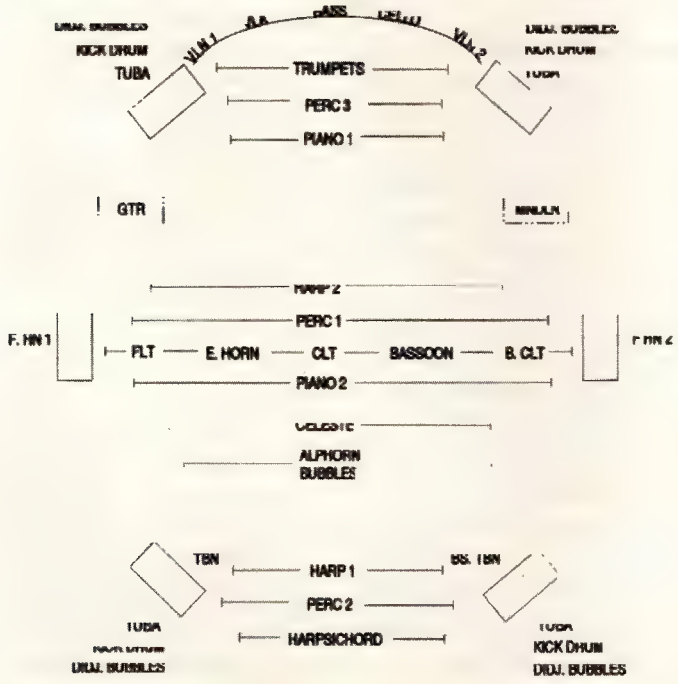


IMAGE LAYOUT FOR
FRANK ZAPPA
"THE YELLOW SHARK"
REV 1, AUGUST 19, 1992

it in order is another thing.

In other words, it's a hellacious chore for someone.

Well, the vault is very well organized. And I know where stuff is, but nobody else does. In order to put it in a condition where anybody could go in there and find anything anytime they needed it, it would take about a year and a bar-code generator. Even a student intern wouldn't know what the fuck to do with it, because many of the road tapes have never even been listened to. They are still gaffered shut just the way they came off the road. And in order to log it, you've got to listen to it. And what intern is even going to know what he's hearing? And the mental notes that I have about what's on those tapes is not only what the tunes are, but where the good versions are. And your only other option to leaving the stuff scattered like that is to go through the arduous process of making logs of everything, clip the good takes out, collate them, and start yet another library.

Does it frustrate you that it's impossible to do all of these things as fast as you would want to?

Yes. Let me put it to you another way. If I could, I'd keep my studio running 24 hours a day. For some of those things that need to be done on the studio level, I don't need to be in the control room with the engineer. I could just give instructions, and because the board is automated, once you've done a mix, if anything needs to be changed in the mix, all he's got to do is go back and tweak a couple of faders and rerun it, and no time is lost. But this engineer that I'm working with, Spence , is a mutant, because not only does he understand old analog technology — he's still a vinyl guy at home, and he's one of these guys that likes tube amplifiers and all this kind of stuff — but he knows how to operate all of the digital recording equipment. He understands the Sonic Solutions, and he can even operate that aspect of the Synclavier that interfaces with the recording machines. In other words, I could leave him alone. I could say, "Call up this sequence, do this, this, this, and this," and he knows how to run all these things.

Now there's not too many recording engineers that I know of that have a hands-on experience with all this gear and do it right. And he's got real good ears for balancing things. I would need three guys like that in order to run three eight-hour shifts in there. And I feel lucky that I can get him four days a week, ten hours a day. But you know at the end of the day when he's got to go back to his wife, I'm sitting there going, "Oh well, we almost got that one done." It drives you crazy a little bit, but then on the other hand, if I were to just hire a bunch of guys to move the faders up and down, I wouldn't get "the good result." And besides, all these people have very unique personalities. Todd is truly a unique and mysterious character. Same with Dondorf, same with Chrislu. And fortunately they all get along with each other. And it's very amusing to be in the same room with these three guys trying to have a conversation with each other. I really enjoy it. Z

DM: ***Nicolas Slonimsky describes you as the pioneer of the future millennium of music. Do you have a concept of what he means?***

No, but he's very kind to make up something like that. When you start using words like millennium, that's pushing the boundaries of good taste.

DM: ***He explained that the technology you have mastered opens up compositional possibilities never available to any composer before.***

Well, the sad thing is that the technologies that I've developed are probably not going to be available to any composer afterwards either, because the technologies are all so expensive. Unless something happens to bring down the cost of the tools that I'm using, then most of the other people who are writing music will never be able to deal with it.

DM: ***So you don't think there will be a drop in price as the technology changes?***

If there's another whole machine invented that does what the Synclavier does and sells for a reasonable amount of money, yes, but I don't see any chance in the world that the Synclavier's price is going to come down. As a matter of fact, at New England Digital they're trying to phase out their relationship with musicians and design the machine purely as a post-production tool for video and motion pictures for doing sound effects. This thing was originally designed as a digital instrument for the musician, but that part of their consumer base is the least significant now, so all their research and improvements are going in the direction of making a useful tool for grinding out commercials and soundtracks. [*Since this interview, New England Digital has gone out of business.*]

DM: ***That makes you one of the only inhabitants of the little island in what happened in music in the '80s and '90s.***

Probably.

DM: ***That's kind of sad.***

Well, I don't think it's going to be any great loss. Nobody knows what I did anyway, so how are they going to miss it?

DM: ***You have a sense that no one knows what you're doing?***

I don't think that anybody has any idea what goes on in my room over there, because very little of it has been released on record — they have no idea.

DM: ***You've had trouble with distribution, but is it also part of the problem that the refinement of your music creates a smaller and smaller audience?***

I think that the shrinkage of the audience is inevitable, but the distribution problem is not inevitable. That's an unfortunate situation that I can't really do anything about, but I don't believe the access to distribution or the lack of it is an accidental occurrence.

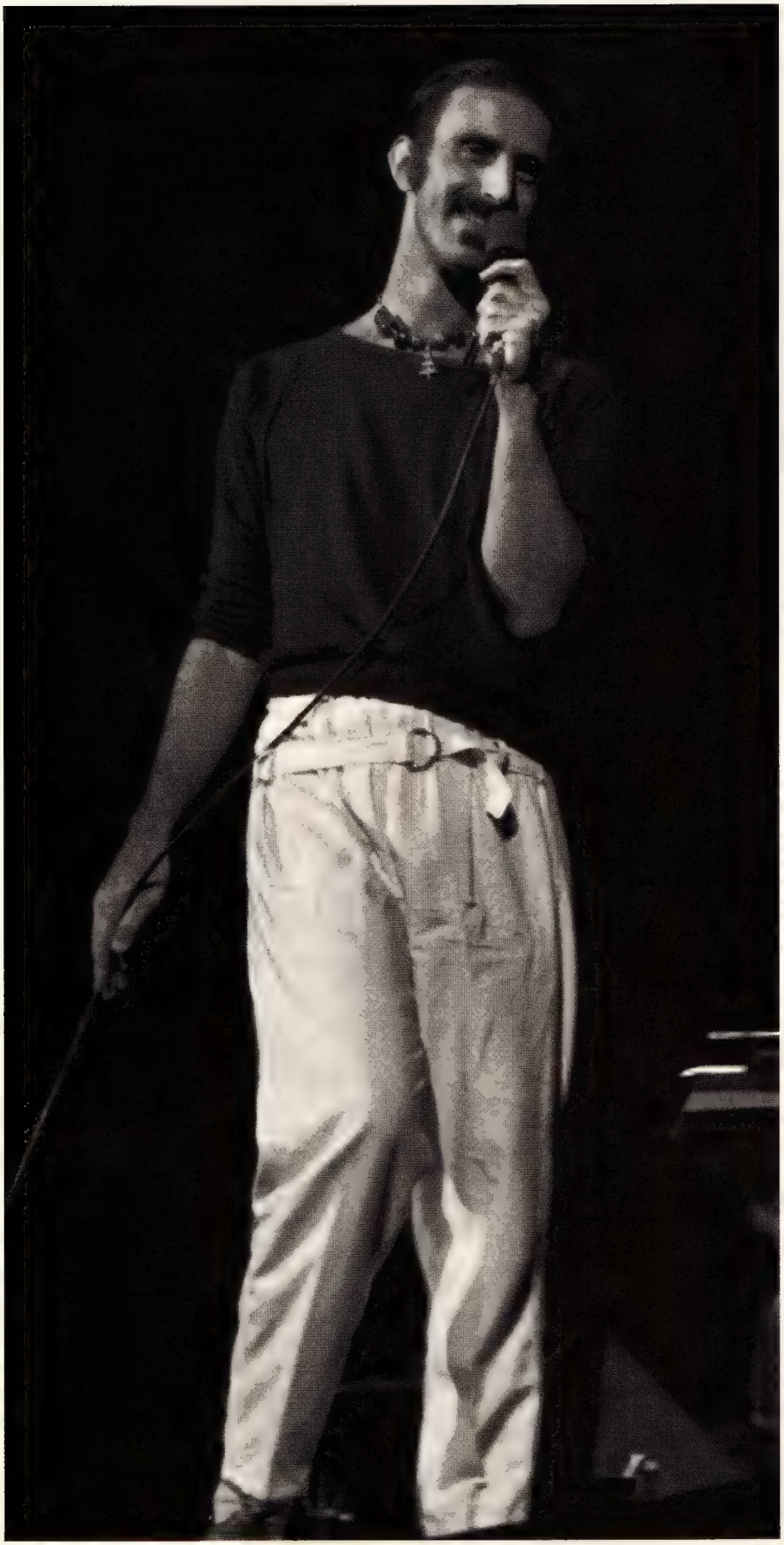
DM: ***You say you can't do anything about it. Is it curable by anyone?***

Not in the United States. I mean, I think that I still have a potential market worldwide outside the United States, but as long as we have the current type of political and supposedly moral machinery of the United States, the way it is now, it's not likely that this music has much of a future in this country.

MG: ***What's gratifying to me is that some of your stuff is available now on CD. I go into very conventional record stores, and I see this huge row of your CDs.***

But not in every state. California or the Los Angeles area may be neat in terms of the amount of stuff that's in stores, but there are other places where major chains won't carry it. There was an article in *Billboard* last year about some chain based in Washington State that has over 100 outlets that didn't want to carry this stuff. One of the things that they were trying to do is say that the lyrics on these albums were too nasty, but one of the things that they didn't want to sell was *Jazz from Hell*, which is an instrumental record. When *Billboard* questioned the guy about it, he said, "Well, if it's not the lyrics, then it must be the cover." The cover was just a picture of my face.

MG: ***I saw you perform, I think it was in***



1981 at the Santa Monica Civic, and I was startled to see this nice, portly old man come out and perform with you. It was Nicolas Slonimsky. How did you get him to join you onstage?

I'd been asked to be the host of a concert in New York for the celebration of Louise Varèse's 90th birthday, and my function in the concert was to be the MC. What they were trying to do was get a younger audience to come and hear the music of Varèse, and I thought that to do a good job, maybe I should talk to some people who knew something about Varèse's background and get some anecdotes that I could pass along to the audience. It turned out that this was completely unnecessary, because when the concert occurred, the audience was so unruly, it was just like a Palladium Halloween audience. The concert was at the Palladium. They were behaving like a rock and roll audience. They sat completely still when the music was being played, but as soon as the music stopped there was pandemonium, so there was no way to tell them anything. But I did make the attempt to get some information from Slonimsky about Varèse, and that's how I met him. At the end of the '81 tour, I think it was the last day, we invited him to come onstage and participate in some improvisation. He was a good sport and went out and did it.

DM: ***He said it was one of the great experiences of his musical life, partly because the crowd was a rock and roll crowd that jumped up and shouted. He was used to small crowds of polite music-listeners.***

I've been to a few of those, too. Every once in a while they do a little Nicolas Slonimsky birthday celebration here in Los Angeles. Composers contribute little compositions as birthday gifts. I've done two of those. I went to one of these things; it was held at the art gallery in downtown Los Angeles. It was pretty mild. There's no substitute for a rock and roll audience.

DM: ***He said to me that he wanted sometime soon to sit down with you and talk about "the basics." Are there "basics" you'd like to talk to him about?***

We've had some little discussions about technique in music. I'm reasonably familiar with his books, and on one occasion, when he came over here, we videotaped him, and I asked him to explain the theory behind the chords in that book of scales that most people are familiar with. It was really quite interesting, because it's based on the simple idea that if you take an octave or groups of octaves, and divide them into proportions other than the way in which normal music is divided, then you wind up with different types of harmony. It never occurred to me that that was the simple logic that was generating all those scales. But that was basically me listening to him talk. Maybe on some occasion we should sit down and talk about the way in which I put my stuff together, but there hasn't been a convenient time to do it.

DM: ***He described you as being what he***

would call a classical constructionist, meaning that you use 12 tones and 11 intervals — as is tradition in Western music — with not a whole lot of reliance on quarter-tones or other modalities, and that in the samples that you do for the Synclavier, you're constructing new sounds with these 12 tones and 11 intervals. Would you agree with this description?

It's true that I haven't written very much music on the Synclavier that involves pitches that are not on the tempered scale, but in live music performances we'll deal with any kind of musical material that happens to be at hand. The closest I can get to quarter-tone music is when I sing.

DM: ***Is that intentional?***

No, I just don't have any control over it.

DM: ***Do you have a feeling that you'll ever go into other tunings, or is dissonance just something to be resolved?***

Well, I don't always resolve it. Most of the time I just leave it squatting there. I did a lot of early experimentation with quarter-tone stuff and found it not to be that interesting for my ear. To me, the net result of a whole composition based on quarter-tones sounds like a badly tuned piano. I've heard recordings of Ives quarter-tone piano music which just sounds like the piano tuner was an amateur. You would imagine, if you were a music student and you were interested in dissonance, that you could be even more dissonant by writing quarter-tone music and stacking clusters of that. But to my ear, it doesn't really work.

DM: ***When you construct music, are you thinking vertically — thinking of chords?***

Any stack of notes you can call a chord — or any stack of sounds, whether they're musical pitches or just textures. I mean, I like chords of percussion instruments where you get a chordal result if you have a bass drum, a castanet, a jingle bell, and a guiro at the same time — if they're all hit at the same time, you will get some sort of a chordal sensation out of it, partly because there is a pitch content to all those instruments. It doesn't hit you in the face like a trumpet, but there is pitch content. You can prove that by taking a sample of the bass drum or any of these instruments and playing up and down the keyboard — you'll hear the pitch move.

DM: ***But when you're sitting down and thinking, "Today I'm writing music," are you thinking, "This is in the key of C# minor"?***

No, I never did that.

DM: ***How do you resolve things in your music? How do you build and resolve? Is there a plan?***

It depends on what kind of piece it is. And there are a number of ways you can enter the data into the Synclavier. One is to play it on the keyboard, another is to play it on the Octapad. You can type it in in this obscure language called Script — which I don't know how to do — or you can type it in on the "G Page," which is just a stack of numbers, kind of like a phone book, or you can type it in in music notation, which allows you to see staves on a screen. So there's a lot of different ways to enter it. Depending on how you enter it, that makes a difference in how you develop whatever was there to begin with. Since I have only minimal keyboard technique, anything that I play in on the keyboard, I have to do it with the speed knob turned way down. Then do a lot of editing to it after it's been entered in. But all those piano parts on "N-Lite" — you know, those cadenzas and stuff? I played them.

MG: ***Did you know where you were going with that piece?***

I DID A LOT OF EARLY EXPERIMENTATION WITH QUARTER-TONE STUFF AND FOUND IT NOT TO BE THAT INTERESTING. TO ME, THE NET RESULT OF A WHOLE COMPOSITION BASED ON QUARTER-TONES SOUNDS LIKE A BADLY TUNED PIANO.

No. Because the most boring part of composing is when you finally understand what the object is that you're working on, and you know what the boundaries are, you know where it's beginning and where it's ending, and then you're down to the drudgery of cleaning it up. That's the most tedious part to me, but it's something that has to be done before you put it onto tape or transfer it into music printing so that somebody can play it. The fun part is getting a new batch of samples and figuring out how you can manipulate them. You'll be starting to generate the material. One of the reasons why the stuff takes so long to do is that the preparation work to do a composition is so lengthy and involved that just gathering up the material to make your piece could take two or three months. Then, on a couple of days, you'll sit there and do some stuff to it and come up with the beginning of the piece, and then it just stays on the hard disk in storage for however long until you get interested in it again.

MG: ***Do you work on a lot of things at once?***

Yeah, right now there's probably about five hundred different titles.

MG: ***Unfinished.***

Yeah.

MG: ***Do you know what they are?***

No, once they're in hard-disk storage, when I go back to them, all you're doing is looking at a computer number. You call it up, and you have only the vaguest recollection of what the thing was or how it started out. First of all, when it's stored, it's stored with the software of the age in which it was done, and there could have been two software updates a year, so things can be outmoded fairly rapidly. Also, it's stored with the older samples that were available at the time, so the first thing I do with an old piece that I want to listen to again is call it up and look at what sample patches are already on there and check to see whether I have newer, better samples for any of those sounds to replace all those things. I piddle around with it for a while, then re-save it in its somewhat updated edition. I might not even do any work on it — just haul it out, and listen to it, and see where it's going to go. But for the past year, I've been so involved with this Ensemble Modern project that most of the composition work has just been that drudgery part — just cleaning it up, getting ready for this thing.

MG: ***Do you rank your music in any kind of hierarchy? Do you consider the rock and roll stuff inferior to the classical stuff?***

No.

MG: ***It's all the same?***

It's a different aspect of the same thing. I've got an imagination. So I earn a living by producing merchandisable manifestations of portions of my imagination.

MG: ***So you don't do one type of music in order to pay for another?***

No, I would probably do "Baby Take Your Teeth Out" if nobody paid me. I mean, nobody *did* pay me. That particular song was concocted at a soundcheck at the place where this concert was taking place in Frankfurt. We played at the Alte Oper in 1982, and that song came from that soundcheck.

DM: ***I'm still stuck on something you brought up about not ranking your compositions. If something like "N-Lite" took ten years to do —***

— and "Baby Take Your Teeth Out" took 20 minutes, why should they be the same?

DM: ***It seems to me you've put more into one than the other, and therefore you might have an opinion of that effort yielding more than the 20-minute one.***

Well, the function of both things is to enter-

tain. The one that took ten years is probably way over budget in terms of how much bang for the buck you're going to get. The end of any piece is basically: you're decorating time. "Baby Take Your Teeth Out" is a minute and ten seconds. Okay, so it shouldn't have taken ten years. It should have taken much less, and it did, but if that minute and ten seconds amuses you, okay, fine. And then there are people who will never be able to sit through "N-Lite" — it's 23 minutes long. They would rather have a minute and ten seconds of something that'll make them laugh. The point is that each piece, for what it is supposed to do, achieves a certain level of entertainment success.

DM: ***If you don't rank your pieces, what differentiation do you make between live work, Synclavier work, and some of the work being done to fund this so-called "more serious" music?***

Well, if I had never done any rock and roll, I wouldn't have a Synclavier. It's as simple as that. I mean, I earn my living by making rock and roll records. But I didn't set out to do rock and roll just so I could spend my sunset years frying my room with a high radiation source.

MG: ***Did you anticipate the development of this technology?***

Not to the point that I see it being available now. All along, from the point that I could afford to buy new audio tools, I would seek out those designers — and there are plenty of guys in Los Angeles who'll build you any kind of a box you'd care to describe, so long as you can afford to do it, and in the '70s I used to do certain experimentation with electronic devices for making music, but it's always better to have something off the shelf with a company behind it that will repair it when it explodes.

MG: ***In other interviews, you've said you were exasperated by your music not being played correctly.***

Well, yeah.

MG: ***And it seems that this technology is the answer to Frank Zappa's problem. Here it is exactly the way you want it to be performed.***

Well, even with the most perfect Synclavier performance, you still don't get 100%, because there are certain nuances that are going to be absent just because the music is being played by samples, which means every note will always be the same sound.

MG: ***You can't alter that?***

You can put vibrato on it and change its amplitude and change its duration, but basically it is a digital recording of some event. What you lose is — for example, you have a patch of clarinet notes, and every clarinet note is perfect, and they're lovely clarinet notes, and then you tell the Synclavier to play this ungodly fast clarinet riff that no human being could play. That's nice. You could never get it another way. But on the other hand, if you have a really fine clarinet player, every one of the notes that he played would be different, and your ear detects that variety. I think that the ear prefers variety, unless you happen to be one of those Mongoloids who thinks that the drum machine is the greatest device known to mankind. I can't stand to listen to them. Even in the case of kick drums and snare drums, you hear exactly the same pulse at 100% amplitude each time.

MG: ***So contemporary pop music doesn't do much for you.***

Yeah, that's true. On the Synclavier, when we do repeated patterns with percussion samples, what we want to try and do is have multiple samples of the snare drum and the kick drum, so that every time the pulse comes along, it's actually a different recording and gives it more texture and variety.

DM: ***When you were talking about the Synclavier being an endangered species, what does that mean for the future of music? Will composers revert back to guitars and live groups and small synthesizers?***

I don't think there are going to be that many composers in the future. I think that in today's world, if a person decides to be a composer, that person should probably seek medical help, because there's no way for you to earn a living. You can't. You have to have another job. You can't just write music.

DM: ***That's sort of sad.***

I don't think it was ever really that much better, but things are getting especially tough now because there are no budgets for the performances, no budgets for rehearsal. If a chamber group or an orchestra does a performance of something, it's probably something that's already been written for a hundred years, and the orchestra already knows it, which means that they don't have to spend money for rehearsal. They play only the hits. And some guy who decides he wants to write music in the United States, what does he do? He may be able to write it down, but he's never going to get it played. And it takes so long to do it, and the mechanics of preparing just the paperwork to hand it to an orchestra are quite expensive, so it's an exercise in futility.

MG: ***But that's what you do.***

Well, I don't think there's even an opportunity to do that anymore. If I were to go out and try to get a record contract today, as a new artist, I couldn't get one.

MG: ***It seems that the culture is so fragmented that people who would be interested in composing serious orchestral music don't know anything about pop music. You're one of the few people that has jumped from category to category. Who else has orchestral music in the rock bin at Tower?***

Yeah, but basically that's neither here nor there. Just because I managed to get away with it doesn't have any real impact on what the real problem is. If you expect to have a future history of music, somebody's got to write it, and they can't write it unless they can survive while they're writing it. That's what's being endangered. I mean, spotted owls are nice, but nobody gives a fuck about composers. They have no meaning, they have no lobby, they have no power to control the payment of royalties due them for performances of their material. Those industrial entities that consume the compositions — like the commercial business, the movie business — all have contracts which are basically designed to deprive the composer of all of his rights. For example, if you do a film score, it is not likely you'll be able to maintain your own publishing royalties. The motion picture companies are going to take all that away. So what do you do?

DM: ***In Germany they're funding these performances with lots of money, and you've mentioned other regional groups or territories coming up with similar festivals. Why does it work there and not here? Or will it start failing there?***

It's difficult there, because the German economy has the major burden of bringing the East into the 20th Century, and that's eating up a lot of the cash that might be spent on culture, but they still maintain cultural events. The thing is, in the United States there is an anti-cultural bias. You can't even use that word. There are two words you don't use in connection with the U.S. government: You don't use the "C" word, which is "culture," and you don't use the "I" word, which is "intellectual."

When [Czech president/playwright Vaclav] Havel gave a speech to the Congress, he did something really unbelievable. He got the entire Congress to cheer for intellectuals by using this spurious jujitsu method, claiming the Founding Fathers were intellectuals, thereby forcing the American legislators to go "Yeah!" for intellectuals. But that word has never been used effectively in conjunction with any form of U.S. government before. Just as it's very easy for candidates to say things like, "We will solve the deficit by slashing waste, fraud, and abuse," it's also easy to take aim at the National Endowment for the Arts or any other kind of cultural funding and give the public the impression that the world would be a better place if you never spent any more money keeping artists alive because who needs that? It's interesting that that kind of logic is so successful to the American electorate. They are willing to buy into this theory that any support for artistic activity is somehow unhealthy, when in fact if you look at the economic numbers there are ways to show that investment in things of an artistic nature creates jobs for other people that had nothing to do with art.

The best example would be if you have a decaying inner-city area like SoHo in New York. Before the artists moved into SoHo, it was just warehouses — it was a run down area. So a few artists moved in, and they did some painting, and then they opened a gallery, then they opened a coffee shop, and the next thing you know the whole thing was gentrified and you've got apartments in the area that are going for $3,000 to

$5,000 a month. That same type of scenario has repeated itself in other cities in the United States, but nobody ever looks at that. The result of just a few dollars spent to make life easier for artists eventually turns out to make profits for people who are not connected with art.

These arguments against the National Endowment for the Arts really piss me off. On the one hand, I hate the idea that government should be involved in any way with the arts, because it means that somebody with a government title who knows nothing about art has to pass out money. But on the other hand, the bulk of the cash of the NEA yearly budget — which is a mere 175 million dollars, a pittance compared to other government projects — the bulk of it does not go for financing things like the Mapplethorpe exhibition. Mapplethorpe [a photographer whose exhibition included male nudes] got $45,000. The bulk of the money goes to support regional ballet companies, regional orchestras, or things where there's some community involvement. That's the reason why it was set up, and that's the way the bulk of the money is spent. And if you throw that away, then what have you got? Do you really want to see a country like the United States converted into nothing more than a nation of drones, getting up, going to their miserable little jobs, producing odd products that nobody wants to buy, and then coming home and watching television? Is that — I mean, there has to be more to life than just going to work and then wallowing in the garbage that you created while you were at work.

MG: ***There also seems to be sort of a backlash against the arts because of a correct perception that most people who are involved in creative self-expression have contempt for that, or at least they're opposed to the more conservative ideas. And people can't accept that.***

I think the whole idea of a conservative bent in the United States is a media fiction. There are two important media fictions that you have to see through in order to comprehend life in the United States. One of them is the constant drone of these guys, who are basically right-wing operatives, who go on television and complain about the liberal media bias. This simply doesn't exist, because all the media are owned by right-wing guys. There's no liberal media bias there. That's a straw man that has been constructed. When they constructed it, the idea was that, "Oh! If there's a liberal media bias, we must balance it by having more right-wing content in our programming," thereby giving them the license to saturate and spin-doctor all the news that comes to you. I don't think that the sentiment of the population really is the way that television would convince you things are. The whole goal — especially in news broadcasting — is to convince anybody watching that all things connected with the Republican Party are good and all things not connected with the Republican Party are bad. That's the subtext of all of this. No matter what it is, if it's not of the Republican species, then it is bad.

DM: ***How do things like* The Simpsons *slip onto television?***

Well, that's a good question.

MG: ***I'm mystified myself. I don't know.***

I just hope they don't cut you.

MG: ***I think that — as you know — you make people laugh, and sometimes you fool them.***

Yeah, but you didn't fool the nuclear industry, or the lumber guys.

MG: ***No, the fact that a little radioactive rod falls in the back of Homer's neck in every episode, they caught on to that one. No, you can say anything on television as long as you say it once, but if you start repeating it, then they start catching on. That's why — you can't imagine the kind of stuff we get taken apart for on* The Simpsons. *It's everything. Promoting homosexuality, and disrespect —***

DM: ***Is humor the preferable way to tell the truth, or a safe way?***

It beats the hell out of turning to somebody and saying, "Boy, you've got bad breath." Or whatever horrible truth you have to do. I mean, why make life even more difficult for the person who has the problem?

MG: ***So how do you oppose these guys?***

You want to know what they hate more than anything else in life? They can't stand for people not to take them seriously. If you laugh at them for an instant, it's just like — the devil walks in the room, right? And he goes, "I'm the Devil," and you take a fork and poke him in the belly, and the gas comes out, and he'll go twirling around the room like an unleashed balloon. That's the way these guys are. You can't laugh at them. They hate it, because they're so full of shit, they're so full of themselves that they just can't believe that people don't appreciate them for the grand, highly evolved creatures that they imagine themselves to be. They hate to be laughed at. If they weren't so fucking dangerous, it would be fun to laugh at them all the time, but sometimes you have to take into account how much damage they can do.

DM: ***When you were at the Senate in '85, were you serious or funny?***

I thought I was funny.

DM: ***Did they?***

Well, the audience did. They kept telling the audience to shut up. The atmosphere there was really very strange, because the hearing itself was such a mongrelization. It took place in the Science, Commerce, and Transportation Committee — the least likely place in all of the U.S. government you'd think that the matter of rock lyrics should be brought up. The reason it was there was that five of the members of the committee had wives who had signed the original PMRC letter, and they were using it as a photo op, and it was wildly attended. There were 50 still photographers and something like 30 video teams. It was a big media event. And one of the senators said, "I've been on committees dealing with the MX, the budget, this thing, that thing, and I have never seen anything like this in my life." It was the hot ticket of 1985.

DM: ***What do you mean, he'd never seen anything like it?***

The media zoo that sprang up around the issue. One of the stars of the hearing was Paula Hawkins, the Nancy Reagan lookalike from Florida — she had the reputation of being the least effective senator; she was really a disaster. Another one of her outstanding features was that all the Watergate burglars had found employment in her office in Florida. She was just this miserable thing. She wasn't a member of the committee, but she was having trouble getting re-elected, so Danforth, who was the chairman of the committee, did her a favor — one Republican to another — and allowed her to participate in the media circus, make some comments, and, you know, to grill me. She was the one who wanted to know what kind of toys my children had.

DM: ***How come you quit going directly before political groups? Was it because the bad guys were getting too much publicity out of it? Or are you just tired of the chore?***

No, no — it's not being tired. I mean, I'll still make comments about it, but to go on these debate shows, to be commoditized as yet another talking head anytime somebody wants. . . . The topic of censorship comes up, my phone starts ringing, you know? Some rap group gets its record banned someplace and my phone rings. And they think that the next day, they're going to have their special sound bite where I'll go on and debate with Tipper Gore. I mean that's the mentality, the level of the debate. And I just refuse to do that.

DM: ***So it's a stupid use of your time?***

Well, it's for a worthy cause, but I think you could be more effective just talking generally about the idea of why this type of censorship is occurring and who's behind it than to do the talk show circuit every time one of these things hits the news wheel, and go on and you be a character who is against censorship and you will be debating somebody from some Christian organization. It's just hokey.

DM: ***Why is it that some of the rap groups are getting a better deal than you are? What has changed? You were a bad guy back in the '60s and '70s, and your records are now banned for distribution in certain states or places, yet most of these groups are going out there to the record bins. How come you're so honored?***

I don't think any of those records pose much of a political threat to the people who'd like to see it stopped.

DM: ***What's your political threat?***

I can talk. And there's always the possibility that someone will ask me a question, and I'll tell them what I think. They don't want to have anybody make fun of them. Besides, the situation with the lyrics of most of the rap records is, you've got basically two topics. You have sex and racism.

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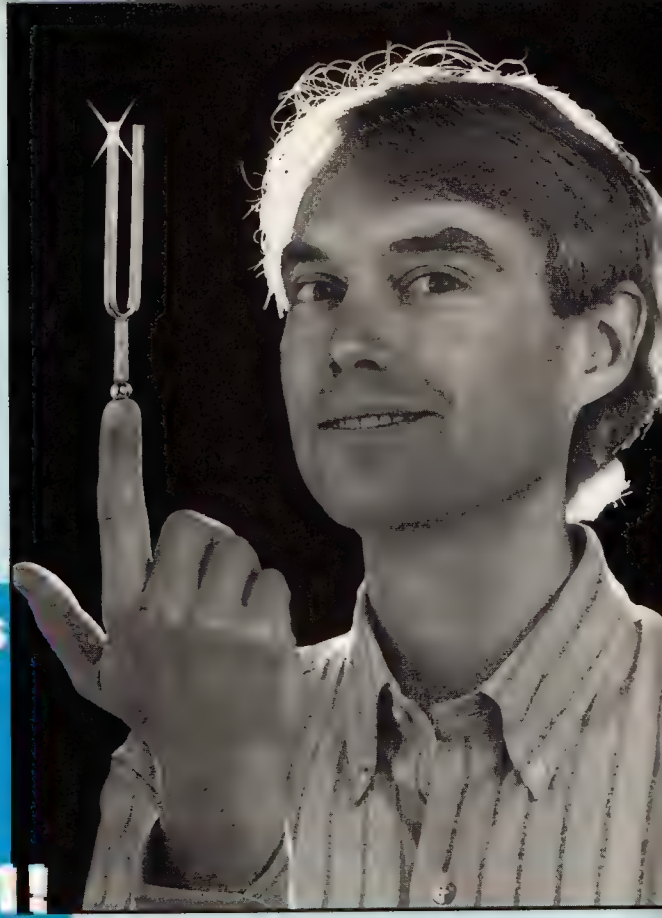
"They laughed when I said they could have Perfect Pitch *...until I showed them the secret!"*



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Perfect Pitch Lesson #1!

A great ear for music means knowing how to listen.

by David L. Burge

IT ALL STARTED in ninth grade as a sort of teenage rivalry.

I would practice the piano for about five hours daily. Linda didn't practice anywhere near that amount. But somehow she always seemed to have an edge which made *her* the star performer of our school.

It was frustrating.

What does she have that I don't? I would wonder.

Linda's best friend, Sheryl, sensed my growing competition. One day she bragged on and on about Linda, adding more fuel to my fire.

"You could *never* be as good as *Linda*," she taunted. "*Linda's* got *Perfect Pitch*."

"What's Perfect Pitch?" I asked.

Sheryl gloated over a few of Linda's uncanny musical abilities: how she could name any tone or chord—*just by ear*; how she could sing any pitch she wanted—*from mere memory*; and how she could even play songs after only *listening* to them on the radio!

My heart sank. *Her fantastic EAR is the key to her success* I thought.

How could I ever hope to compete with her?

But later I doubted Sheryl's story. How could anyone *possibly* know F♯ or B♭ just by *listening?* An ear like that would give someone a mastery of the entire musical language!

It bothered me. Did Linda *really* have Perfect Pitch? I finally got up the nerve and point-blank asked Linda if the rumors were true.

"Yes," she nodded to me aloofly.

But Perfect Pitch was too good to believe. I rudely pressed, "Can I test you sometime?"

"OK," she replied cheerfully.

Now I couldn't wait to make her eat her words...

My plan was ingeniously simple:

I picked a moment when Linda least suspected it. Then I boldly challenged her to name tones for me—*by ear.*

I made sure she had not been playing any music. I made her stand so she could not see the piano keyboard. I made certain that other classmates could not help her. I got everything just right so I could expose Linda's Perfect Pitch claims as a ridiculous joke.

Nervously, I plotted my testing strategy. Linda appeared serene.

With silent apprehension I selected a tone to play. (She'll *never* guess an F♯!)

I had barely touched the key.

"F♯," she said.

I was astonished.

I quickly played another tone. She didn't even stop to think. *Instantly* she announced the correct pitch.

Frantically, I played more and more tones, here and there on the keyboard, but each time she knew the pitch—without effort. She was SO amazing—she could identify tones as easily as *colors!*

"Sing an E♭," I demanded, determined to mess her up.

With the barest pause she sang the proper pitch. I had her sing more tones (trying hard to make them increasingly difficult), but still she sang each one perfectly on pitch.

I was totally boggled. "*How in the world do you do it?*" I blurted.

"I don't know," she sighed. And to my great dismay, that was as much as I could get out of her!

The dazzle of Perfect Pitch hit me hard. My head was dizzy with disbelief, yet from that moment on I knew that Perfect Pitch is real.

Perfect Pitch method proven by research at TWO leading universities!

I couldn't figure it out...

"*How does she DO it?*" I kept asking myself. On the other hand, why can't *everyone* recognize musical tones by ear?

Then it dawned on me that *most musicians* can't tell C from C♯, or A major from F major—like artists who brush painting after painting without ever knowing green from turquoise. It all seemed so odd and contradictory.

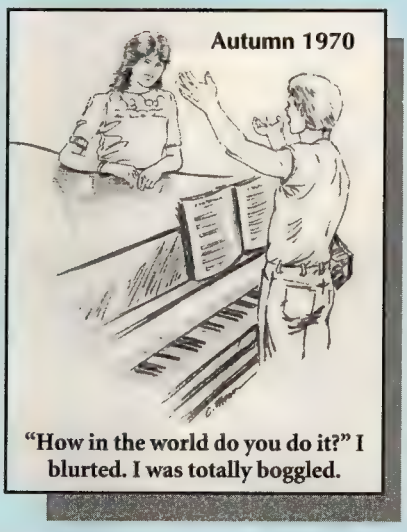
I found myself even more mystified than before.

Humiliated and puzzled, I went home to work on this problem. At age 14, this was a hard nut to crack.

You can be sure I tried it myself. I would sweet-talk my brothers and sisters into playing tones for me so I could guess each pitch by ear. My many attempts were dismal failures.

So I tried playing the tones over and over in order to memorize them. I tried to feel the "highness" or "lowness" of each pitch. I tried day after day to learn and absorb those elusive tones, but nothing worked. I simply could *not* recognize the pitches by ear.

After weeks in vain, I finally gave in. Linda's gift was indeed extraordinary. But for me, it was out of reach.



"How in the world do you do it?" I blurted. I was totally boggled.

Then came the realization...

It was like a miracle. A turn of fate. Like finding the lost Holy Grail.

Once I had stopped *straining* my ear, I started to listen NATURALLY. Then the incredible secret to Perfect Pitch jumped right into my lap.

I began to notice faint "colors" within the tones. Not *visual* colors, but colors of *pitch*, colors of *sound*.

They had always been there. But this was the first time I had ever really "let go"—and *listened*—to discover these subtle differences within the musical tones.

Soon I too could recognize the tones by ear! It was simple. I could hear how F♯ sounds one way, while B♭ has a different pitch color sound—sort of like "hearing" red and blue!

The realization hit me: THIS IS PERFECT PITCH! This is how Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Debussy and scores of others could mentally envision their masterpieces—and identify tones, chords and keys just by ear—*by tuning in to these subtle pitch colors within the tones.*

It was almost childish—I felt that *anyone* could unlock their own Perfect Pitch by learning this simple secret of "color hearing."

So I told my best friend Ann (a flutist) that *she* could have Perfect Pitch too. She *laughed* at me.

"You have to be *born* with Perfect Pitch," she asserted.

"You just don't understand how Perfect Pitch *works*," I explained. "It's *easy!*"

I showed her how to listen. Timidly, she confessed that she too could hear the pitch colors. Soon Ann had *also* acquired Perfect Pitch! We became instant school celebrities. Students tested us in amazement. Everyone was awed by our virtuoso ears.

Way back then I would not have dreamed that I would later explain my discovery to college music professors. When I did, many of them *laughed* at me at first. You may have guessed it—they told me you had to be *born* with Perfect Pitch.

But once I revealed the *secret* to Perfect Pitch—*and they heard for themselves*—you'd be surprised how fast they would change their tune!

As I continued my own music studies, my Perfect Pitch allowed me to progress far faster than I ever thought possible. I even *skipped over* two required college courses. Perfect Pitch made *everything* much easier—performing, composing, arranging, sight-reading, transposing, improvising—and it skyrocketed my *enjoyment* as well. I learned that music is definitely a HEARING art.

And as for Linda?

...Oh yes—well, time found us at the end of our senior year of high school. I was nearly 18, and it was now my *final chance* to outdo her.

Our local university sponsored a high school music festival each spring. That last year, I scored an A+ in the most advanced performance category. Linda only got an A.

Sweet victory was mine at last!

Today, thousands of musicians and two university studies have confirmed the effectiveness of my Perfect Pitch method.

Now I'd like to show YOU how to discover your own Perfect Pitch—whatever your age!

I hope *you* won't laugh as you picture *yourself* with various Perfect Pitch skills—like naming tones and chords *by ear* with laser-like precision! Of course, you might be surprised at how *simple*—and how very *valuable*—Perfect Pitch really is!

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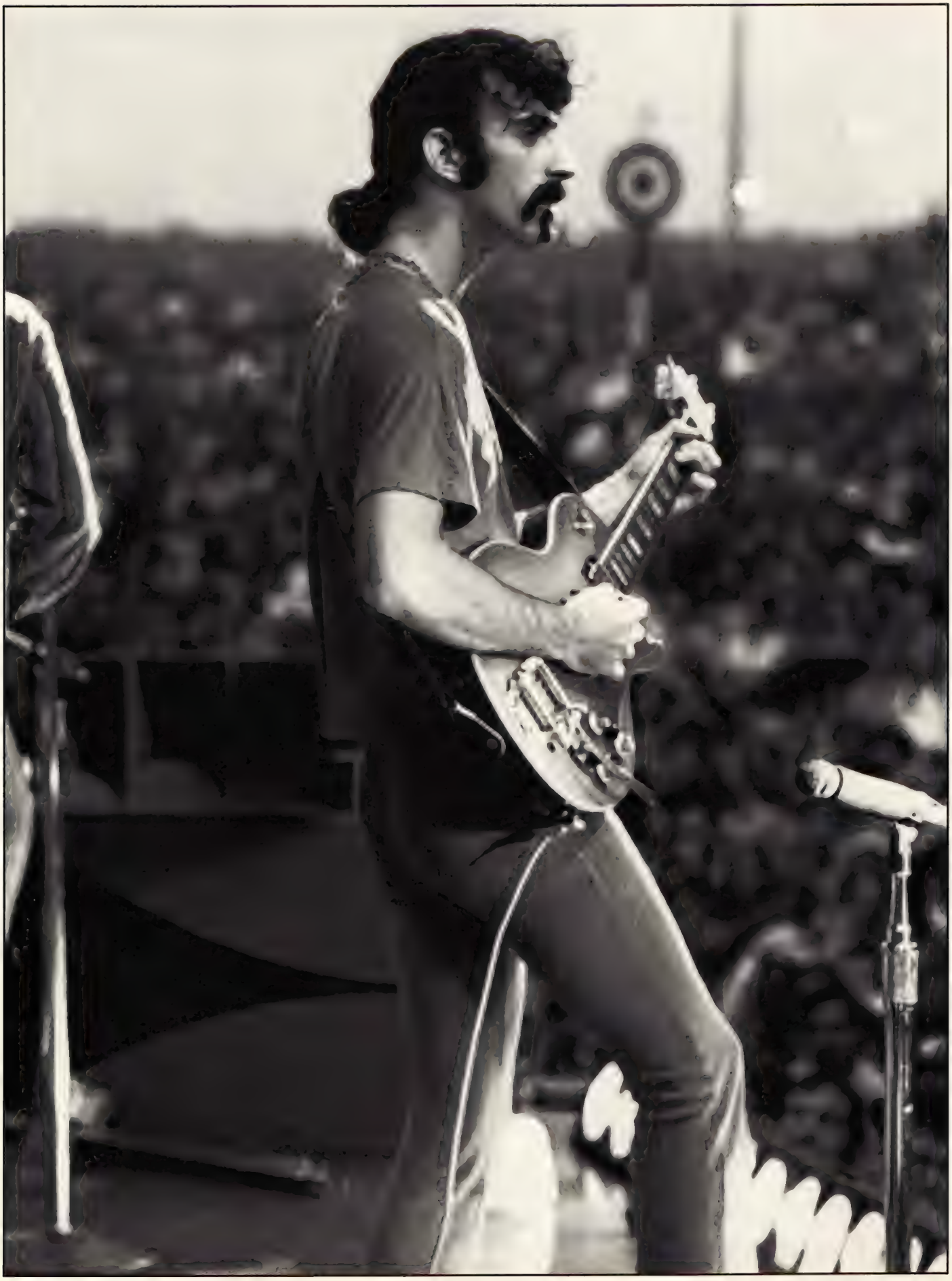
Research references: A study to determine the effectiveness of the David L. Burge technique for development of Perfect Pitch, M.E. Nering (1991), The University of Calgary; *An experimental investigation of the effectiveness of training on absolute pitch in adult musicians,* M.A. Rush (1989), The Ohio State University. *We will include research summaries with your FREE Perfect Pitch Lesson #1.*



DM: ***Do you think there's more racism in music now?***

Yeah. But it's a reflection of the times. I think there's more racism in government.

MG: ***Can we talk about some of your pre-Mothers Of Invention composing? I'm remembering one of the mystery disks from the early '60s, something you had done at Mount St. Mary's College. What was that?***

Mount St. Mary's was the first time I had a concert of my music. As with most of the other concerts of my music, I had to pay for it.

MG: ***What year was that?***

That was 1962. That was a bargain, though, because it was only $300. It was a student orchestra. There were probably about fifty people in the audience, and — for some strange reason — KPFK taped it, and I got a copy.

MG: ***What were the compositions?***

There was one thing called "Opus 5," and there were aleatoric compositions that involved a certain amount of improvisation, and there were some written sections that you actually had to play. Some of the things were graphic, and there was a tape of some electronic music that was being played in the background with orchestra, and I had some 8mm films that were being projected.

MG: ***This obviously didn't pay the rent. How did you pay the rent at the time?***

My only source of income was working this barbecue joint up in Sun Village. I'd work there on weekends.

MG: ***Really?***

Yeah. In the band, I wasn't making barbecue.

MG: ***What was the band?***

It was just a pickup band. Some guys that I knew from high school who lived up there. I would come up, plug in my guitar, play with them.

MG: ***You didn't record any of that stuff?***

Yes, we did. Some of that's on the mystery disk, too. There was no rehearsal. You'd just go up there and play bar band music, and if somebody was in the audience, and they wanted to sing, like a take of "Cora" — they were singing "Steal Away" —

MG: ***Did anybody ever ask for "Caravan," with the drum solo?***

That actually happened when we worked at a gig in El Monte. Some drunken buffoon in the audience requested it. [*Slurs like a drunk:*] "I wanna hear 'Caravan' with a drum sola!" There are certain things you remember from your career, like that line. When we worked at this music fair out in Long Island, we were the opening act for the Vanilla Fudge. 1968, I think it was. I remember this one guy out in the audience — it was the Westbury Music Fair — and the quote was [*loud and belligerent:*] "Youse guys stink! Bring on the Fudge!"

MG: ***You were Captain Beefheart's road manager for a short time.***

Yeah.

MG: ***And you went to Europe?***

I was supposed to.be MC for the first big rock festival in France, at a time when the French government was very right-wing, and they didn't want to have large-scale rock and roll in the country. And so at the last minute, this festival was moved from France to Belgium, right across the border, into a turnip field. They constructed a tent, which was held up by these enormous girders. They had 15,000 people in a big circus tent. This was in November, I think. The weather was really not very nice. It's cold, and it's damp, and it *was* in the middle of a turnip field. I mean mondo turnips. And all the acts, and all the people who wished to see these acts, were urged to find this location in the turnip field, and show up for this festival. And they'd hired me to be the MC and also to bring over Captain Beefheart. It was his first appearance over there. And it was a nightmare, because nobody could speak English, and I couldn't speak French, or anything else for that matter. So my function was really rather limited. I felt a little bit like Linda McCartney. I'd stand there and go wave, wave, wave.

AFTER THE DANCE THERE WAS WHAT COULD HAVE TURNED INTO A REALLY UNFORTUNATE CONFRONTATION WITH THE LETTERMEN FROM THE SCHOOL, THE VARSITY WHITE-BREAD BOYS, WHO WANTED TO BEAT ME AND THE BAND UP AFTER THE SHOW AS WE WERE LOADING OUR EQUIPMENT. IT WAS SO UNBELIEVABLY HOKEY.

I sat in with a few of the groups during the three days of the festival. But it was so miserable because all these European hippies had brought their sleeping bags, and they had the bags laid out on the ground in this tent, and they basically froze and slept through the entire festival, which went on 24 hours a day, around the clock. One of the highlights of the event was the Art Ensemble Of Chicago, which went on at 5:00 A.M. to an audience of slumbering Euro-hippies.

DM: ***In turnips. . . .***

And to alert them to the fact that they were performing, one of the guys lit a flare and threw it right out into the middle of the audience, which made some of them jump up and dance around wildly and try and put the fire out.

MG: ***Tell about the hot dogs.***

Oh, yeah. Because it was located in a turnip area, and far away from anything that you would call necessary supports for civilization, the menu was limited. The people who were attending this festival, including all the talent, had access to these foodstuffs: Belgian waffles in plastic — these puffy little waffles in plastic, you could have that — or you could have a hot dog. Now the hot dogs were kept in this tank. When I was a kid, they used to have these big tanks for Nehi beverages, you know, a rectangular tank full of water, and there would be drink bottles in it. Well, in this case, there was a tank full of these Belgian weenies. Now, some of them would float to the surface, and the tips that would stick out were *green*, and we don't know what color the material under the water was, but it was a tank of green weenies poking out, and you could either eat that or the Belgian waffles. And you couldn't send out for a pizza. You were in the middle of nowhere.

MG: ***Did you ever play with Beefheart's Magic Band?***

Yeah.

DM: ***What year was that?***

'69 or '70.

MG: ***How did you meet them?***

I went to high school with him [Don Van Vliet/Captain Beefheart].

MG: ***Did you go to class together?***

No, not exactly. At the time that I knew him, his father had had a heart attack. His father drove a bread truck, and so Don had dropped out of school to take over the father's bread truck route, which was between Lancaster and Mojave. So I used to go over to his house, and we had all the used pineapple buns that we could ever wish for out of the truck. We'd sit around and listen to rhythm and blues records and eat what was left over from the bread truck route.

MG: ***Did you have any idea what your futures held?***

Did we know we were going into show business? No.

MG: ***Did you scheme, did you plan, did you fantasize?***

At that time, not. I don't have any recollection of sitting around with Don and going, "Yeah, now we'll. . . ." No, we were just listening to R&B records and eating pineapple buns.

DM: ***You both have a graphics background. Were you artists then, or being musicians, or both?***

He had been doing painting and sculpting for a long time. My graphics background was I'd had some art classes in school. I didn't really

want to go into that. I did earn my living as a commercial artist for a little while during that period, but —

MG: ***What kind of stuff did you do?***

I did greeting cards, I wrote advertising copy for the First National Bank in Ontario, California, and I did some little illustrations.

DM: ***Anything that was often out there?***

Some of the greeting cards were often out there. I convinced the guy that I was working for — this place in Claremont, California, called the Nile Running Greeting Card studio, that specialized in silk-screening, that cards of a floral nature would likely be considered entertaining by elderly Midwestern women.

MG: ***Very focused in the graphics!***

Yeah, it was niche marketing. You knew what they liked, and you serviced the need. And I was in the silk-screen department with the big rubber gloves, you know, going [*makes squeaky, tugging noise*] and pulling the Mylar off of these smelly things. And so I talked him into letting me do my own line of greeting cards on an experimental basis, designed some of these cards, and designed a little rack to dispose of them.

DM: ***Do you have them anymore?***

There's some around, yeah. They're truly awful.

DM: ***Give us the wording and the image.***

Well, one of them was — it was printed on chrome-coat stock, you know, a nice glossy stock. The front of the card says, "Captured Russian Photo Shows Evidence of American Presence on Moon First." And you open it up, and there's a picture of a lunar crater with "Jesus Saves" inscribed on it.

DM: ***You were a bad boy already, huh? What else?***

Let's see, there was another one that just said, "Goodbye" on the front, and inside: a black hand. And — this is fairly abstract — one where the front of the card said, "Farky." You open it up, and there's a picture of a pirate. Think about it for a while. You have to look at this guy and imagine him saying that word, and then you derive the meaning that was intended.

DM: ***You've always been good at naming things. All these words, you have a great sense of —***

I think it's because of this old book that I found.

DM: ***Which was?***

I don't even remember the name of it. It's probably around here someplace. It's an old, decrepit, leather-backed book about the ancient Egyptian religion. One of the little-known facts about this religion is: When you're on your way to heaven, you can't go anywhere unless you know the name of everything. So the Egyptian rulers, in their preparation for going to heaven, spent a lot of time memorizing the name of the doorsill, the name of the door frame, the name of the paving stones, the name of everything. Because nothing would let you by, unless you could name it.

DM: ***You were worried.***

Big time!

MG: ***How could anybody resist albums with names like* Lumpy Gravy, Uncle Meat, Hot Rats, *or* Burnt Weeny Sandwich*?***

I don't know. A lot of people did resist it.

MG: ***How did you get on* The Steve Allen Show *in '62?***

Just called them up, and said I play the bicycle, and you know, they were booking all kinds of goofy things on there. The tape was given to me as a birthday gift a few years ago. Someone found a copy of it and sent it over.

MG: ***What was it like?***

Well, first of all, I'm clean-shaven, and I'm wearing a suit and a tie, and my speech patterns resemble the way Dweezil talks now, which I thought was very odd.

MG: ***So, when did you grow your mustache and — whatever you called this [indicating hair beneath Frank's lip]?***

Actually, I grew it when I was in high school, but I shaved it off after I got out of high school. I had a little skinny mustache and a "Genghis" down here.

MG: ***You could get away with that?***

What were they going to do, throw me out of school? They did.

DM: ***Did you get thrown out, really?***

Yeah. I got in some trouble, and they told me that I could either write a 2,000-word essay or be suspended for two weeks, so I took a two-week vacation, and I showed up back in school with a list of all my R&B records by artist and label, and a list of all the ones that I thought I was going to buy for the next three or four months, and that was my 2,000-word essay. I laughed at them.

DM: ***What did they say?***

What could they say? They didn't like me, and I knew they didn't like me, and I didn't like them. And I graduated with 12 or 20 units less than what you needed to graduate with, but they couldn't think of keeping me there for another year. It was unthinkable.

MG: ***You were in a band at that time, too, right? So you were just a* degenerate.**

Absolutely. The scum of the earth, as far as the people in Lancaster were concerned. See, I didn't know when I moved to Lancaster that, prior to my arrival, there had been an unfortunate experience with "Negroes" in the area. A group of black entertainers had come up from what they call "down below," the evil area below the high desert. They had come up. It was Big Jay McNeeley and a bunch of other entertainers that had come to do a rock show at the fairgrounds, and along with them came people who were selling reefers and pills, and the founding fathers of the city decided never again shall this music enter our fair cowboy area. I didn't know any of this had happened. I moved there from San Diego, and put a rhythm and blues band together, and decided to throw my own dance, and put up little posters just like in the 1950 movies with the help of this lady who ran the local record store. Her name was Elsie. We rented the women's club, and we were going to have our little dance there. And the day before the dance, walking down Lancaster Boulevard at 6:00 o'clock in the evening, I was arrested for vagrancy. They kept me in jail overnight, trying to make sure this dance wasn't going to come off.

DM: ***How old were you?***

Seventeen.

MG: ***So what happened?***

I got out, and we had the dance.

MG: ***And civilization didn't fall.***

It didn't fall. And furthermore, the dance — see, all of the black people in the area lived out in Sun Village, like 20 or 30 miles away from the school. They were in their own little turkey-infested ghetto, and they came to this dance, because I had a mixed band. There was a couple of blacks, a couple of Mexicans. You know, there weren't that many white-bread people who could play anything that resembled rock and roll in the area, so we just had this hodgepodge band. The whole attitude of that area up there was very strange. After the dance there was what could have turned into a really unfortunate confrontation with the lettermen from the school, the varsity white-bread boys, who wanted to beat me and the band up after the show as we were loading our equipment. It was so unbelievably hokey. The Sun Village residents came to our rescue. When they saw what was happening, trunks started opening up and chains started coming out and things like that, and the lettermen walked away.

MG: ***So, you weren't popular in school?***

No.

MG: ***Were you distinctly unpopular?***

Yes.

MG: ***With the kids?***

With everybody. What I wore to school was — you know, those — they're wearing them now, those blue-hooded parkas. I would go to school with a blue-hooded parka up, with sunglasses on, my mustache, my little goatee, and I'd take my guitar to school.

MG: ***Did you play in the school orchestra?***

Yeah, drums.

DM: ***Education is losing all funding for music programs. Is this another black hole in the future?***

Well, it seems to me that the subtext for stamping out the arts. . . . In the realm of arts, you always have the possibility for creative thinking, which means deviation from the norm, the prescribed political norm that everybody is trying to cram down your throat. If they can stop creative thinking, then they've got a better chance of maintaining the stranglehold of stupidity on the entire population. And creative thinking can, and often does, start at an early age. So if they can nip it in the bud, while the little beggars are in school, then it's good for them. I think they

would like to replace every single art program with some sort of sport or ROTC thing just to keep people from thinking.

MG: ***What made you switch from drums to guitar?***

I just liked the way the guitar sounded, and I lacked the proper hand-to-foot coordination to play a drum set. When I was in high school orchestras, all you had to do was be able to roll and go boom and ding and stuff like that, but it's a different story to play syncopation. I was never really good enough to be a drummer in a band, and the first rock-and-roll gig that I had — it's been stated before that on my way to the gig as a drummer, I had forgotten my drumsticks, and had to drive back to the other side of town to get them.

MG: ***So you were listening to Varèse at the time, and other classical weirdos. Was there anybody else who was digging that besides you?***

When I was a senior, my brother Bobby was a freshman. And I didn't have any friends, but he had three or four, and they used to come over to the house, and I would make them listen to these records.

DM: ***You talked about one time being in New York and walking by Varèse's place on Sullivan Street and thinking of him being in that room or house or apartment for 25 years, unable to compose music.***

He stopped. He stopped writing for 25 years.

DM: ***Why?***

Because nobody would play it.

DM: ***What happened to him in the last 25 years of his life?***

Well, in the last few years of his life, he was "rehabilitated." Columbia decided to do some recordings of his music —

DM: ***Slonimsky's recordings?***

No. Slonimsky's was the first recording of "Ionisations." The second recording of the Varèse stuff, as far as I know, was that EMS 401 disc that dates from 1950.

MG: ***Was that the famous one you bought?***

Yeah. In the late '60s, Columbia decided to do some recordings of his music. They did two or three albums with, I think, Robert Craft, the guy who recorded most of the Stravinsky stuff, and there were some concerts in New York City at Town Hall, and so he got a little bit of recognition.

[The talk turns to other "bad boy" composers, including George Anthiel and his "Ballet mecanique."]

There's another album by him, on a Dutch label. I have it. There are a group of pieces for piano and violin. It has "Ballet mecanique" on one side, and it has these obscure pieces — the thing that's odd about these pieces is the rhythm. I put the needle in the groove and started listening, and I went, "Son-of-a-bitch. I could have written that." It really sounded like "The Black Page."

There were a couple of people who were vying for the title of "Bad Boy of Music" during that period. The other guy was Leo Ornstein, who was a composer who wrote piano music, some of which was to be played with a two-by-four. One of his pieces was called "Wild Men's Dance." You couldn't play the chords with your fingers, you needed a 2-by-4. You can imagine a guy in a tuxedo in Carnegie Hall going DUN DUN DUN DUN DUN — "This is 'Wild Men's Dance'! I'm the Bad Boy of Music! DUN DUN!"

DM: ***What is Conlon Nancarrow doing these days?***

I think he had a heart attack recently. He still lives in Mexico City. He's another example of a guy who couldn't earn a living in the United States. He was being ignored, so he moved to Mexico, and punched his [player piano] rolls down there. It was cheaper for him to live in Mexico City.

DM: ***He comes from a little town in Arkansas. He must have had an unhappy youth.***

Yeah. Bad boy in Arkansas. Well, how about Harry Partch?

MG: ***His music is still being played.***

All his instruments went to this foundation which is located in Escondido, and they maintain all this stuff and give performances of his music.

MG: ***What do you think of Harry Partch?***

I like the sound of the instruments, and I like parts of the compositions, but I think that the stuff goes on and on and on and on and on too long. There's too many repetitions. But the idea of it appeals to me a lot. But it's so personalized. He went all the way. He built his own instruments, developed his own tuning system, developed his own compositional machinery, and just went out there and did it, and he was a pretty good hobo at the same time. That's essentially an American composer kind of a thing to do.

DM: ***Did you run into lots of interesting composers in Eastern Europe?***

I've run into a lot of composers. How interesting they are is hard for me to tell, because, you know, when you run into them, you don't always get to hear what they write. But a few of them gave me cassettes of their music. I didn't find them interesting. Some of it just sounded like graduation-from-the-Conservatory exercises, and things like that.

I heard one guy in Moscow who had made a tape. We went to a gallery, Mars, and there was some electronic music playing in the background. I thought it was really very good. It sounded like the work of a guy who should have been writing for orchestra but because he wasn't an official Soviet composer had no access to an orchestra, so he was doing all of his stuff with MIDI gear. And it was good. I think there are plenty of people around the world who have the imagination to create new compositions. One thing that you have to remember: musicians play music. They don't write it. Composers write music. So if you don't have something for a musician to do, you will be treated to noodling. You will have "The World o' Scales," "The World o' Licks," but you won't have compositions. It's a special knack to invent structures, to invent new harmony, and to invent reasons for doing things. I mean, it's a different skill than being a musician.

MG: ***Do you think that there's a progression — that music should make progress? That you should do things that haven't been done before?***

I think that all music should be personalized. If you decide that you want to be the bad boy of music and play with a two-by-four, then that's your message. Go do it, and the audience that wants to buy records of piano played by two-by-four should have it. But I think that if you're going to do music, it should be something relevant to the person who writes the music. It has more to do with the composer than to do with the style of the times or the school that might have generated the composer. Only in that way is the product valuable: if there's an artifact of an imagination, rather than an artifact of a movement.

MG: ***What do you think about the traditional composers? Do you care for the old guys?***

Well, name me an old guy.

MG: ***Beethoven?***

I have an appreciation for the skill of putting it together, but the sound of it is not something that I enjoy, so. . . .

DM: ***Brahms? Bach?***

Bach is more interesting.

DM: ***Why?***

I just like the way it sounds. The same reason I like Varèse. I like the way it sounds. But I wouldn't go out of my way to attend a Bach concert or buy an album of that kind of music. To me, of that period, that is the most tolerable of the material to listen to. I don't start getting interested in so-called classical music until the early 20th Century.

MG: ***Mahler?***

No. I actually like Wagner. I think Wagner was interesting. It's too long, but it's interesting. I have very few Wagner albums, but the things that I've heard, if you look at the time at which it was written, and what he's doing with the material, it's challenging. That's the thing that depresses me about most of the music of that period. It's just not challenging, because it was written to spec. There was a king or a duke or a church or somebody who said, "Hey. You need to write something. We have a festival coming up, and it must be something I will like." So everything was written to suit the taste buds of some joker with a towel on his head.

DM: ***So the theory that the church or the nobility helped make the Renaissance happen, or the classical period, is not true in your mind?***

I think it probably held back some of the greatest composers, because you had no choice. If you

wanted to write, you had to write at the behest of somebody who had more money than you. It's like dealing with radio-station programmers and the guy who puts your video on MTV. It has to be exactly this, or it goes nowhere. So, here's a guy with 11 kids to feed, what's he going to do? Give the Prince what he wants: [*sings "Halleluja Chorus":*] "Halleluja. Halleluja." [*Imitates a prince:*] "Oh, yeah, I like that. I can understand that."

DM: ***So you're not a fan of Handel either?***

No.

DM: ***Schoenberg?***

I've only heard four or five pieces by Schoenberg that I can enjoy listening to. There's the *Septet*, and then there's the suite of pieces for orchestra, the one that has "Summer Morning by the Lake" as one of the movements. I think that's really nice. And *Begleitungsmusik* is a parody of motion picture music. I like that. But there's very little else by Schoenberg that I appreciate. And Berg — I like the "Lyric Suite," I like the — there's a piano solo piece, I think it's called *Piano Sonata* — it's an early piece. I like that. But, I tried to listen to *Lulu*. I couldn't do it. I had the album of *Wozzeck*. I could not get through it.

I like Messiaen. Took me a while, but I like that music. He's colorful. But I must admit that the first Messiaen album that I ever got was an Angel recording of *Chronochromie*, and it baffled the snot out of me. I didn't know what to do with it. I could stay interested for about the first three minutes. I was going, "Whoa, a lot of percussion; that's interesting, but what *is* this?" It took me years before I could listen to that whole side of the album straight through.

DM: ***What finally clicked? Just repetition?***

No. It's just that the more I learned, the more interesting it became, because at the time that I was first exposed to this kind of music, I didn't have a musical education. I was just a guy buying records. Everything that I liked was based on my gut reaction to what was on the record. For some reason I liked Varèse right away. I liked Stravinsky right away, but these other things not. I didn't like Charlie Parker. I didn't like some other modern jazz things. Listening to these things, I would go, "Why do people like this? I don't understand it."

DM: ***What became different in the way you listened? What do you start hearing?***

Well, when you start learning about structure, when you start learning about how things work, then you can appreciate how other people deal with the material. Look, if you're writing diatonic music, you've got 12 note names over seven or eight octaves. That's a pretty limited universe. What can you do to take these components, shake them up, reassemble them, and make something that you would call a composition? That's a pretty interesting challenge. I think that other art forms have a much more open — not an open format, but more material to work with. If you're a poet, let's say there are 300,000 or 400,000 words in the English language. There's your universe. But the possibilities are a little bit more restricted in terms of the structure when you're dealing with diatonics. So the more I learned about what the rules of the game were, the more I could appreciate how other people might solve this problem. How do you maintain somebody's interest over any period of time with what you've concocted? Today I have such a limited amount of recreational listening time that if I decide that I'm going to listen to something — I have a very big collection of records and CDs — I'll pull something out, and I'll put it on so I can really focus on it and go, "Boy, that's interesting."

IF YOU'RE WRITING DIATONIC MUSIC, YOU'VE GOT 12 NOTE NAMES OVER SEVEN OR EIGHT OCTAVES. THAT'S A PRETTY LIMITED UNIVERSE. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO TAKE THESE COMPONENTS, SHAKE THEM UP, REASSEMBLE THEM, AND MAKE SOMETHING THAT YOU WOULD CALL A COMPOSITION? THAT'S A PRETTY INTERESTING CHALLENGE.

DM: ***When you're listening to music, then, are you responding intellectually more than emotionally? Are you getting swept away by some great cadence, or is it an idea that's hitting you?***

You just have an appreciation for what it is. I mean, I don't think about the composer. I don't sit there and go, "Boy, what a great guy. He dreamed that up." You know, because all I hear is the music. I hear the material performing its little function before my very ears. I listen to the piece. I don't know anything about the lives of these guys. They may have all been absolute bastards. I probably don't want to know what kind of a guy Webern was, but I like the music. And the same for the other pieces that I enjoy listening to. I'm not thinking about who wrote it, or why he wrote it. I'm only listening to the results.

DM: ***Do you ever listen with interest to the scoring for TV shows or movies?***

Oh, that's so transparent. There's hardly any challenge to that. The thing that always amazes me the most about scoring for films is where they *don't* use music. That's what's important. To me, films that are heavily laden with score material are almost like sitcoms with too much laugh track. When there's too much [*sings beginning of Beethoven's* Fifth Symphony] DAH-DAH-DAH *DAH*. When the cellos come in, you know, the guy's saying, "Dramatic now. Appreciate this dramatic moment. Alert! Alert! Drama coming up. Major 7th chord — they're in love! Look out, here comes the love!" It's offensive to me. I find the films where you can really. . . . If the sound effects are well recorded, and the natural sound of what's going on is interspersed with just a little bit of music, to me it works a lot better.

DM: ***What about some of the experimenters, like John Cage doing silence [a piece called* 4'33" *in which the performer makes no intentional sounds]?***

I think that's an acquired taste. When I first learned of Cage's work, it seemed like the concept of it was far more entertaining than the audio result, but that could have just been a matter of the performances that were available on record at that time. Because even if you're going to be performing — well, silence is a bad example, but somebody with more abstract notations that require a conscious participation of willingness on the part of musicians to do something constructive in the piece. It's not often that you find musicians who like that idea and who will do a good job with it. I'm pretty sure that early recordings of Cage did not have willing accomplices.

DM: ***You can have a lot of notes on paper, but if it's not well performed, it's not good to listen to.***

It's not that there's a lot of notes on the page. A lot of it is really empty. See, contemporary music seems to go through this period where everybody discovered Webern and said, "Write ventilated music." So, a lot of people were writing highly ventilated constructions, but nobody did as well as Webern with the exception, I think, of this tape of Boulez I heard. I really like that, which is all fairly ventilated, but there was this post-Webernian school that sprang up, and it just turned into "boop, beep" music. And the boop beep was eventually replaced by minimalism, which is pentatonic and repetitive. It was like, give 'em a hook, and keep it coming, and so that's what you got.

DM: ***What do you got with new age music?***

Well, that's like listening to, I think of it as kind of an audio ointment with jingle bells attached.

MG: ***But it makes the Pringles taste a little better.***

Not if you're at the dentist's office, which is the environment in which it seems to thrive. But that's just my own personal thing.

MG: ***The musical trend that drives me the craziest is when you call a company and are put on hold, and you're forced to listen to whatever it is.***

It's awful. That's like people telling you to have a nice day.

MG: ***Let's talk a little bit about your reactions in non-Western music, like Indian music.***

I've always loved Indian music. There was even a period of my life when I thought, "I must go to India to hear this music." Then I heard how many needles they had to give you, and what kind of diseases were lurking for you over there. I decided, "Well, I'll just get the records instead." I like Indian music, and I like Bulgarian music a lot.

DM: ***What about music from Africa? Do you ever listen to the tribal stuff?***

Yeah. I've heard it, but I'm . . . a lot of people are fascinated by the rhythm, but the rhythm of it is not so exciting to me. I'm not as interested in African music as I am in Bulgarian or Sardinian or Indian music. I think a lot of people listen to African music and want to consume it in the same way that they would consume a U.S. drum machine record. That fancy constant rhythm. And my taste in rhythm goes in other directions.

MG: ***Didn't you attend a concert of the Bulgarian women when they came here? Did you meet them?***

It was a fairly frightening experience. They take a few musicians along with them. There's a guy who plays some kind of a drum-like thing or guitar-like thing, but it looked to me like these guys were Bulgarian KGB, like they were watchdogs for the group. They had the special look, the black leather coat. And they were hanging out backstage, and when it was done, after the concert, the girls were in the dressing room. They were kind of lined up in a formal reception thing, and we got to come in and say hello, and then we were ushered out. You couldn't really have any communication with them.

MG: ***What about Asian music? Indonesian?***

You mean gamelan music?

MG: ***Gamelan, Balinese, or Javanese?***

That wears on me. The timbre of it is nice, but it goes on and on like a Harry Partch piece. They can play that same pentatonic thing for centuries on end. That's as close as you're going to get to minimalist music.

DM: ***Well, what about noh music? Japanese?***

I like that. That to me is like — it's science-fiction Webern music. You know, people doing erratic grunts followed by one drumbeat and all this oddly balanced stuff. It's like points of sound in time oddly balanced, and I have no idea what it's about or what will be going on onstage, but the sound of it is something I find interesting.

MG: ***What about reggae?***

I don't have a collection of reggae music. I like to play it more than I like to listen to it. Reggae is a ventilated rhythm. If you're going to play a solo with a lot of notes in it and your rhythm accompaniment has a lot of notes in it, then it neutralizes it. I find it more intriguing to play to a reggae background with jagged pulses and big holes in it — there's blank space, whereas the least comfortable thing for me to play to would be something like a fast James Brown band. I wouldn't know what the fuck to do with that.

MG: ***What do you think of Don's [Van Vliet's] music?***

The best of it is unbelievable, and the worst of it is under the influence of some really bad A&R people at Warner Brothers. But there are things on *Trout Mask Replica* that are unbelievable, and on *Clear Spot* also.

MG: ***Is there more from the*** **Trout Mask** ***period?***

There are some other things. Yes.

MG: ***Do you think those will ever come out?***

I don't know. There were things in the original sessions that he didn't want to have used. The original plan for the album was to do it like an ethnic field recording. He and his group lived in a house out in the [San Fernando] Valley, so I wanted to take a portable rig and record the band in the house, and use the different rooms in the house as isolation — very slight. The vocals get done in the bathroom. The drums are set up in the living room. The horn gets played in the garden, all this stuff. And we went over there and set it up, and did tracks that way. I thought they sounded good, but suddenly he was of the opinion that I was just trying to be a cheapskate producer, and not do any studio time. So I said, "Well, you want to go in the studio? Let's go." So —

MG: ***There's a little bit of it on the album, isn't there?***

Yeah. There's some stuff off of a cassette machine that we wanted to have in there — "Dust Blows Forward, Dust Blows Back."

MG: ***And "The Blimp." That's yours.***

I was in the studio mixing some other tapes, and the band that's playing on "The Blimp" is actually the Mothers Of Invention. The vocal on "The Blimp" was recorded by telephone. He had just written these lyrics, and he had one of the guys in the band recite it to me over the phone. I taped it in the studio, and recorded it onto the piece of tape that I had up at the time, which was my track. So, that's how that came about.

MG: ***And now your version of "The Blimp" is out on the re-release version of*** **Weasels Ripped My Flesh,** ***too.***

It's also going to be on this new episode of *You Can't Do That Onstage Anymore.* The piece is called "Charles Ives." We used to play it on the '68-'69 tour.

DM: ***In your so-called orchestral music, do you have visual components going on in your mind while you're composing?***

I always think of something.

DM: ***A lot of composers hate the idea of any sort of program element.***

That's because program music is very old-fashioned, kind of like the cuckoo-in-the-meadow-from-Beethoven syndrome, but the audience consumes music largely pictorially. They make up their own mental picture, so why shouldn't the composer have a little input?

DM: ***So in the case of "The Food Gathering in Post-Industrial America," you were trying to create scurrying sounds?***

Well, when we did it, the sounds themselves were created just as sounds, but when I listened to it, it seemed to me they conjured up this picture of desperate post-yuppies scrounging just through little, you know, nubs of used Pringles and stuff.

DM: ***What about "The Girl in the Magnesium Dress"? That's a strange piece.***

Yeah, it was made from dust.

DM: ***The dress?***

The piece was made from Synclavier digital dust. It's hard to explain, but when you look at the G page on the Synclavier, you'll see note names and numbers, but that's not all that lives on a track. There's subterranean information which can only be viewed when you go out of the user-friendly part of the machine and into the mysterious world of XPL programming. At that point, you can see these things that live on the track that are giving secret instructions to the machine telling it what to do. One classification of these secret instructions is something called "G numbers," which would be derived if you plugged in a guitar. They have this guitar unit that you can plug in, and besides recording the note that you play, it records a bunch of data in the form of G numbers. It's very complicated to explain what G numbers do, but they're not exactly notes. So we found a way to convert bunches of G numbers into note blanks. And G numbers occupy points in time. They indicate that something happened on the guitar string at a certain point in time. It takes a little piece of eternity and slices it up, and if your finger moved, there's a G number that says what your finger did besides just playing the note. So we converted this dust into something that I could then edit for pitch, and the dust indicated a rhythm. So what I did was take the rhythm of the dust and impose pitch data on the dust and thereby move the inaudible G number into the world of audibility with a pitch name on it. That's how "Magnesium Dress" was built.

DM: ***So-called serious music isn't often recognized as being funny, and even when a Mozart or a Beethoven or somebody puts in a little joke, the audience sits with a very straight face. Why is it that either composers or audiences have limited the range that they'll allow to be expressed or heard?***

It's difficult to summarize audience behavior in general on a worldwide level. The audiences

that I'm most familiar with are the ones in the United States, and most of them are of the rock and roll variety, and they do have a sense of humor. What I do know about the U.S. classical audience is, basically, they are not there to hear the music, they are there to see who else showed up. It's a social event more than a musical event. They will go to a concert based on whether there is a star conductor or if there is an acceptable brand-name familiar composer on the program, but most of these people who go to these concerts in the United States haven't a clue as to what's going on. The main event of the evening is intermission, where they go out and piddle around with the white wine in the lobby. One would not expect them to be riddled with humor, especially since many of them happen to be Republicans and you know how they are.

DM: ***Do you think that's true of a Frank Zappa audience at a premiere of an orchestral piece?***

Well, that audience probably is going to come largely from the world of rock and roll. There'll be crossover people. I would imagine that in Germany the audience for this piece is going to be derived mostly from fans of the band. Those fans who like the instrumental music on the tours would be attracted to this show. The ones who want to hear "Titties and Beer," they're going to be radically disappointed. There'll be a certain number of serious music concertgoers that will be there because they might have bought season tickets to the festival or something like that, but I expect that the bulk of the audience is going to be the same people that we play for at the rock shows.

DM: ***Let's talk about the upcoming German festival. Someone the other night described the Ensemble Modern as your new band.***

I wish! One of the things they studiously avoid is having so much to do with any given composer that a composer will influence their ability to have a varied repertoire. There are other ensembles that have been welded to a composer of a certain school and wind up regretting it. And I think that their way is the best. They play all different kinds of music by all different composers, and they have a big repertoire and a busy touring schedule, and I think it would be a big mistake for them to get welded to what I do.

MG: ***Where did the idea of using the didgeridu and the coffee can and water come from?***

Well, a long time ago, we had a contact mic that we put on a Sparkletts bottle, and we got this really close-up sound of this horrible gurgling, glugging stuff. I used it as a sample on the '88 tour in a lot of songs. So it seemed to me the idea of bubble-like sounds of all densities and magnitudes could be used as interesting source material for a composition. Because the musicians in this ensemble take everything so seriously — and I mean seriously: If you tell them to scrape their instrument or do something weird to their instrument, they don't look at you out of the corner of their eye, they'll just do it, and do it very seriously.

The oboe player was blowing bubbles, and when I suggested that she take her didgeridu and stick it into a pot of water and grunt through it and blow bubbles at the same time, she didn't say, "You're out of your mind. I'm a lady. I shouldn't do that!" She got the didgeridu, and a couple of the other guys went out and got the little jug of water, and she knew that she was advancing the science of music like every player ever has, but the sound made me laugh so much I had to leave the room while she was recording it. I couldn't believe it. I'd imagined it would be fairly grotesque when I suggested she do it, but when I heard it, I couldn't stop laughing. I was spoiling the tape. I had to leave. You know, "Just do a bunch of these, and I'll come back."

We expect that it's going to be one of the more enjoyable portions of the concert in Frankfurt, because it's going to be miked through the six-channel system, so that means the illusion for the audience is that they will have the experience of sitting inside of the container of water that she is blowing bubbles into.

DM: ***What are some of the technical challenges of combining the Ensemble Modern with the Synclavier? Is it also going to be making some of the sounds?***

There's going to be a six-channel playback of some of the material generated on the Synclavier that will be used as background for the dancers. It's about 15 or 20 minutes of the show, this piece called "Beat the Reaper." That will be reproduced from a Sony 33-24. All the concerts will have a six-channel P.A. system, and all the musicians onstage will be miked in such a way that they can be positioned around the audience in a kind of interesting spatial perspective.Plus, there's this device called "the hoop," which you can think of as a six-channel fish-pole microphone which can engulf a performer. It's a ring with six microphones around it, and each one of them feeds a different speaker in the hall. It's designed so that you can approach a soloist with this device. You can go up to a performer, put it over his head, go up and down his body while he's playing, and do all kinds of spatial tricks with it.

DM: How is the hoop operated?

A person with a strong arm and a will to succeed [*laughs*] will wander about the stage as I aim him in different directions. During the improvised sections that I'm going to conduct, I'll also be conduting the "hoop meister." And if I point over there, he'll go over. It's kind of like a butterfly net, you know: "Go over and bag that guy over there." And the house mixer is instructed that at those times when the hoop is in operation he is to do a crossfade between all of the mikes on the entire Ensemble. They get faded down, and the only thing that's left in the P.A. is the six mikes inside the hoop. So you get this zoom-in effect. All the audio is focused on that one soloist.

DM: ***The concert is a great honor. How often is your stuff being done around the world?***

Gail would know. We get requests monthly for various things.

MG: ***Do you say yes to everything?***

Sure. There's going to be a CD of the Cincinnati Wind Ensemble, who wants to record "Envelopes" and something else. We just gave permission for that. There are a lot of requests for regional orchestras that want to play "Dupree's Paradise" or "Perfect Stranger." Usually, the things that they've heard already on a CD are the things they want to play. Usually, they are for smaller orchestras. Nobody wants to tackle the big things, because they're too expensive to rehearse, with the exception of this orchestra in Germany that's going to be playing "Bogus Pomp."

MG: ***What's your best-selling album?***

Sheik Yerbouti.

MG: ***Without re-issues? Did anything significantly outsell —***

I don't think anything has outsold *Sheik Yerbouti,* partly because "Bobby Brown (Goes Down)" keeps becoming a hit every ten years.

MG: ***Do you understand why?***

No. Last year in Austria it was number one. It was top ten in Germany, and I think it was back on the charts again in Norway. For no apparent reason, it was back. For those of you who are ever interested in odd things that will happen in the future, we just got a request from Sweden to do a Swedish translation of "Penis Dimension" to be sung by a girl. We're going to let them go ahead and do it. The idea of a Swedish cover on that is pretty fascinating. The Swedes are odd in terms of the things that they choose to cover. Some jazz performer there in the '70s wrote words to "Toads of the Short Forest" and recorded it.

DM: ***Who does covers of your stuff in America?***

Nobody.

MG: ***Are you planning to do any more touring?***

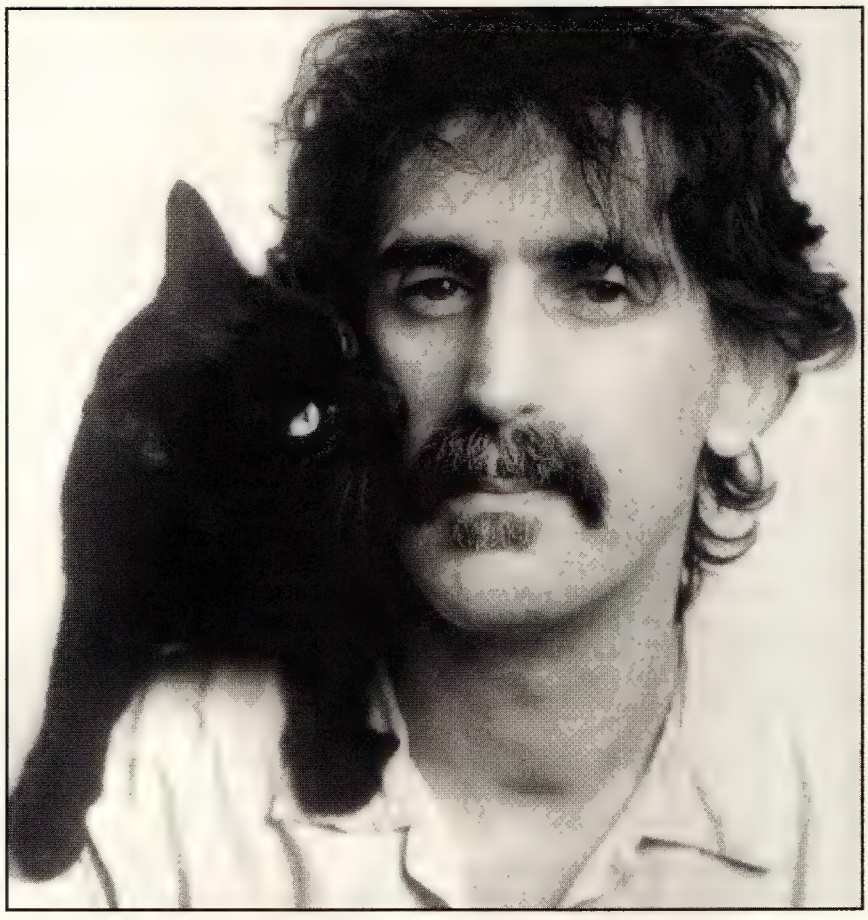
Not if I can help it.

MG: ***What was your reaction to the Grandmothers, the old Mothers Of Invention?***

I thought it was pathetic.

MG: ***Maybe you should do a Frank Zappa band without Frank Zappa. Just send them out on the road to play your music.***

Well, there's been talk of doing that with this Zappa's Universe Project that was done in New York. They're trying to organize a tour of that,



THE HARDEST THING OF ALL IS TO GET A BAND BOOKED INTO ANY VENUE WITH A PROMOTER WHO IS NOT SURE HE'S GOING TO SELL TICKETS. ALTHOUGH I THINK THERE MIGHT BE A MARKET FOR SUCH A BAND, YOU WOULD BE DOING A LOT OF ARM-TWISTING TO GET PROMOTERS TO PUT UP CASH TO BRING IT OUT. IF THERE'S A NAME ATTACHED TO IT, THAT NAME BEING SOMEBODY WHO IS COMING ONSTAGE, THERE'S A WHOLE DIFFERENT MARKETPLACE, BUT IF IT'S JUST BAND X GOING OUT TO PLAY THE TUNES OF. . . .

but it doesn't look like it's going very well, because there's no money behind it. You can't put a band together to go and play hard music without rehearsal, and nobody wants to rehearse without getting paid, so I doubt whether it's going to happen. Probably the Zappa's Universe Project is a one-shot deal.

MG: ***But that was extremely ambitious with all different kinds of ensembles, right? What about just a rock band?***

It's not easy to put together a rock band for any purpose. It's more difficult to put together a rock band to play hard music, and the hardest thing of all is to get a band booked into any venue with a promoter who is not sure he's going to sell tickets. Although I think there might be a market for such a band, you would be doing a lot of arm-twisting to get promoters to put up cash to bring it out. If there's a name attached to it, that name being somebody who is coming onstage, there's a whole different marketplace, but if it's just Band X going out to play the tunes of. . . .

MG: ***But what about some of the great players who've played with you? I'd think people would come out to see it.***

I think people would come out to see it, but you have to convince the promoter. He's the guy who has to put up the down payment.

MG: ***Because it seems as if the venues that you were playing got bigger and bigger and bigger over the years.***

Yeah, but I think it had partly to do with the fact that I was going to be at the venue. I mean, if I'm not going to be at the venue, then I'm not sure that they will stick it in a big venue.

DM: ***Did you just grow to hate touring?***

No. I just got old and ill and not prepared to put up with any kind of travel. Traveling for me is really very uncomfortable, especially in the United States since they have this ridiculous law about no smoking in airplanes. It's an uncivilized way to comport yourself on a trip, so this event in Europe was really a special thing just to go do the six concerts or whatever it's going to be over there.

MG: ***You mentioned that you'd discovered in your archives a large number of hours of music recorded at the Fillmore East in 1970 or '71.***

I didn't realize the volume of releaseable material from those tapings: the album *Playground Psychotics* which will be coming out later this year. . . .

MG: ***You said it was a surprise how much musical material you have. Have you listened to everything you've recorded?***

No. I've got reels of tape in the vault that still have the original silver gaffer's tape from the night that they were stuck in the box at the end of a gig and haven't even been opened. Virtually the entire 1980 tour, which was recorded eight-track, is untouched by human hands. The '73-'74 tour with Ruth, and Chester, and George Duke, the bulk of those tapes from the United States and

Europe, they're all four tracks, are untouched.

MG: *What about the band with Jean-Luc Ponty?*

That was '72. There's a few tapes of that. That's also four-track.

DM: *Did you record almost everything you did on tour? Every night?*

Starting in 1969, Dick Kunc, who was the engineer on some of the early albums, built this little James Bond suitcase recording apparatus. He built a briefcase. He took a couple of Shure mixers, and packed it all in there, and we had a Uher, about this big, 7-1/2 ips. He accompanied us on part of the U.S. tour that year, and would sit in the corner of the room with earphones on and try to do a mix on whatever we were doing. I mean, it was impossible, but there are tapes. The first volume of *You Can't Do That Onstage* was mostly that. Those kind of tapes from the 1969 band. When we did the Pauley Pavilion recording, I had just bought this Scully four-track, and that was the first of the four-track recordings that we did. We recorded four-track for, I guess, ten years, nine years. Then we went to eight-track in 1980. Then we went to a single 24-track machine packed in a box in '81. In '82, I bought the Beach Boys' mobile truck, and put a pair of 24-tracks — in fact we had three. One as a standby, in case the Ampexes blew up, and we used that for a number of years. In '84, I bought the digital 24-track, and we did a tour and recorded that 24-track digital. And in '88, I had two 24-track digital machines, and we did 48-track live recordings of the '88 tour.

DM: *Do you have a good memory of what's good from each of those tours?*

I used to, but I don't think about it much anymore. I used to know the name of the gig, and what song was good on a certain occasion, and I used to be more involved in it, but I'm reaching the end of that phase of my interest in music.

DM: *So, after the German event, you don't necessarily want to resurrect some of these good performances?*

It's hard to find a reason or a market or a logic to package it, with the conclusion of the *You Can't Do That Onstage* series. That was always promised to be six volumes, and it's done. The two remaining live-like objects that will be coming out, *Playground Psychotics* and this other thing called *Ahead of Their Time*, which is the '68 band, I don't know whether there's gonna be a market for anything more than that.

MG: *I think there is a market for anything. Earlier in your career it was much easier to play your whole catalog, in order, and now, as you're releasing more of the stuff from the old years, I have to go back and revise my ideas about what you were doing, because you're throwing in more pieces of the puzzle.*

One of the arguments against putting out that old material is that there's not that many new titles that could be extracted from there. If I were to release that material, it would just be yet another version of "Pound for Brown" or yet another version of "Trouble Every Day." For live performances, there's a limited universe of songs with titles. What there is of a unique nature is that on every occasion, there would be some improvised something or other that would happen during the show that would be a one-off deal. You would have to do a lot of gathering to collate that stuff, and put together albums of songs that exist of only one kind. The '74 band did a lot of that.

MG: *One of the things I like about the albums that are just a single concert, it's like, oh, that's a document of what you experienced that night. I really liked that. Although maybe you can edit the best songs, it's been a pleasure for me to hear entire shows.*

That to me is excruciating, because when I've listened to those, it's hard for me to imagine one show that had so many good things in it that you'd want to release the whole show. There are always mistakes. With live stuff, you want to optimize the sound. You also want to optimize the solos. You've done a tour for four months, and you know that on a certain night, a certain song is played really, really well. It's a shame not to take that version of it and edit it in into the thing. I just think since it's all live, what's the difference whether it came from the same building or not?

DM: *Do you miss playing the guitar?*

Maybe a teenie weenie, teenie tiny, weenie weenie bit, but generally not. Every once in a while I might want to pick it up and play something, but, you know, it hurts. Just manipulating it.

DM: *Your calluses.*

Yeah.

DM: *Marshmallows.*

Yeah.

DM: *You can get those back.*

Yeah, but it takes months to really develop and get your chops up to the point where you can say, "Hey, yeah, I'm a guitar player again." If I had to, I could pick up the guitar and play some kind of a solo right now, but I don't know whether or not I would like to have it stored for future consumption. I mean, you can do instant entertainment to amuse your friends or baffle people on the moment, but compared to some of the things I've done on tape that I think are really good, I'm just so far away from what I was able to do when I had some skill. It's disappointing, and I hate to do things half-assed.

DM: *Do you like ever to listen to your old guitar work?*

A few things, yeah. I'll listen and go, "How in the fuck did I do that?" 'Cause I just really have no idea how to do that.

MG: *Are you going to play guitar at the festival in Frankfurt?*

They want me to, but the logistics are very difficult, because in order to do it I'd have to bring a guitar roadie. I'd have to bring all my armaments, and it would mean I would have to eat up part of their daily rehearsal schedule to do a soundcheck for a fuzz-tone guitar, which is not something that is a pleasurable sensation for anybody. We're on such a tight schedule, the way the concerts are set up. We're going to need every minute we can just to make the P.A. work and get the acoustic instruments balanced. The other thing is that the expectation level would be so high. If I walk out onstage with a guitar, then people will expect me to do something worthwhile, and here you've got this fantastic group playing, and then this has-been guitar player walks up and goes [*imitates weak fanfare:*] "Ta da."

MG: *I have a feeling that members of the audience wouldn't go, "Ugh, a has-been."*

Well, in Germany it's different. First of all, it's a very critical audience. Second, we've played there so much, and it seems like everybody in the country bootlegged the shows. They know what we played when we were there. We have some very dedicated fans in Germany, and I'm sure, without being malicious about it, they would listen to what I was doing and just know that it wasn't as good as what I used to be able to do and then, in the typical German fashion, would reject it.

MG: *You sang "Sofa" in German.*

We learned it phonetically. The translation was done by a girl who used to be our babysitter. She was from Munich, and apparently not a very good translator. People look at what it means in English, and then listen to the German words, and they've told me that the translation is laughable. And then they tell me what it really should be in German, and it's unsingable.

MG: *They ought to be appreciative. Did you ever sing in any other language?*

Dutch. All we had to learn in Dutch was just about a paragraph's worth of this one song, and the audience was so amused that anybody would attempt to do it. That particular tour, I tried to convince Mark and Howard that it was a good idea to learn these things phonetically, because most American groups, if they go and play in another country, make no attempt to communicate in the native language, and I thought it would be a worthwhile gesture and probably a groundbreaking thing to do. In fact, in Germany, it was groundbreaking, because I had reports afterward that people in Germany who were musicians who wanted to do rock and roll had never considered that their language would work for rock. I didn't realize that they weren't doing rock stuff in German. If they did rock, they would be doing bad phonetic English rock lyrics.

DM: *In terms of future recordings, is it going to be the German event and possibly* Phaze III*? Is that happening?*

We're planning two CDs of the German event, or material generated by the German event, or material that involves me and the Ensemble Modern, whether it includes things that were recorded last year. Some combination thereof. And *Phaze III*, which now looks like it's going to be two CDs. Those are the things that are on

the drawing boards now, plus *The Lost Episodes*, that's also coming out. *The Lost Episodes* is all the unreleased studio cuts, Volume One.

MG: *Let's talk about your ideas about time.*

Well, I think that everything is happening all the time, and the only reason why we think of time linearly is because we are conditioned to do it. That's because the human idea of stuff is: it has a beginning and it has an end. I don't think that's necessarily true. You think of time as a constant, a spherical constant —

MG: *— in which —*

— Everything's happening all the time, always did, always will. . . .

MG: *So this coffee cup —*

— Was always full, and always empty —

MG: *— and it's always being drunk, and it's always being heated —*

— And it's always being thrown, and the guy was always painting it, and so on and so forth. Everything is always.

MG: *Why does this empty cup make sense to me?*

I don't know.

MG: *You know what I mean, though?*

Is that a Zen question?

MG: *No, why do I go, "Oh, I have already — the cup that I drank no longer appears to be full."*

Well, that's because it is not full at this particular version of —

MG: *Our perceptions?*

We're dealing with time in a quasi-practical manner. We have devised our own personal universe and lifestyle that is ruled by time sliced this way, and we progress from notch to notch, day by day, and you just learn to meet your deadlines that way. That's only for human convenience. That, to me, is not a good explanation of how things really work. That's only the human perception version of how things work. It seems just as feasible to me that everything is happening all the time. And whether you believe your coffee cup is full or not is irrelevant. It's like — here's another way to explain it. What something is depends more on *when* it is than anything else. You can't define something accurately until you understand *when* it is.

MG: *When in time.*

Yeah, when is *what*. Without the perfect understanding of *when*, you've got nothing to deal with, see? 'Cause you analyze that cup of coffee a little bit earlier, and it's full. In a few minutes, you'll kick it over, and it won't even exist anymore. The state of the cup is determined by when you're perceiving it.

DM: *Which means that the future has already happened.*

Yeah. And the reason why I feel so strongly about this is, you know, this is one of the better explanations for why people can have premonitions, because instead of looking ahead, they're just looking around. You don't have to look ahead to see the future. You can look over there.

I THINK THAT *WHEN* IS A VERY IMPORTANT THING, BUT "WHAT THE FUCK" IS ALSO A VERY IMPORTANT THING TO ASK. JUST KEEP ASKING, "WHAT THE FUCK?" I MEAN, WHY THE FUCK BOTHER? SEE WHAT I MEAN? THE IMPORTANT THING IS, DEAL WITH THE *WHEN*. WHEN WILL OPEN A LOT OF SHIT FOR YOU. "WHAT THE FUCK" REALLY MAKES IT EASIER TO DEAL WITH IT WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND THE WHEN.

DM: *That was going to be my next question. What limits our perceptions of other things or other times or the future?*

I think you devise your own limits for your own personal convenience. There are some people who wish to have limits, and they'll invent as many boxes for themselves as they want. It's like, you know, men invented armor. They wanted to protect themselves from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and so forth. And people do the same thing psychically and psychologically. They build their own armor. They build their own rathole, whatever it is. And they choose their existence. Whether they do it consciously or whether it is helped along by a government or an education system, somebody is helping to shape this imaginary box you live in, but it doesn't have to be there.

DM: *Then what are the limits to our being able to understand what the whole purpose of any of our lives is?*

Well, why do you have to? I think that *when* is a very important thing, but "what the fuck" is also a very important thing to ask. Just keep asking, "What the fuck?" I mean, why the fuck bother? See what I mean? The important thing is, deal with the when. *When* will open a lot of shit for you. "What the fuck" really makes it easier to deal with it when you understand the when.

DM: *You sound like a very mystical but common-sense guy, because you've always talked about the common-sense solution as always the best solution to anything, and yet this is very mystical.*

Why is it mystical? Can you understand that *when* is important? What's mystical about that?

DM: *Well, not just that question so much as the idea that time is a Moebius vortex —*

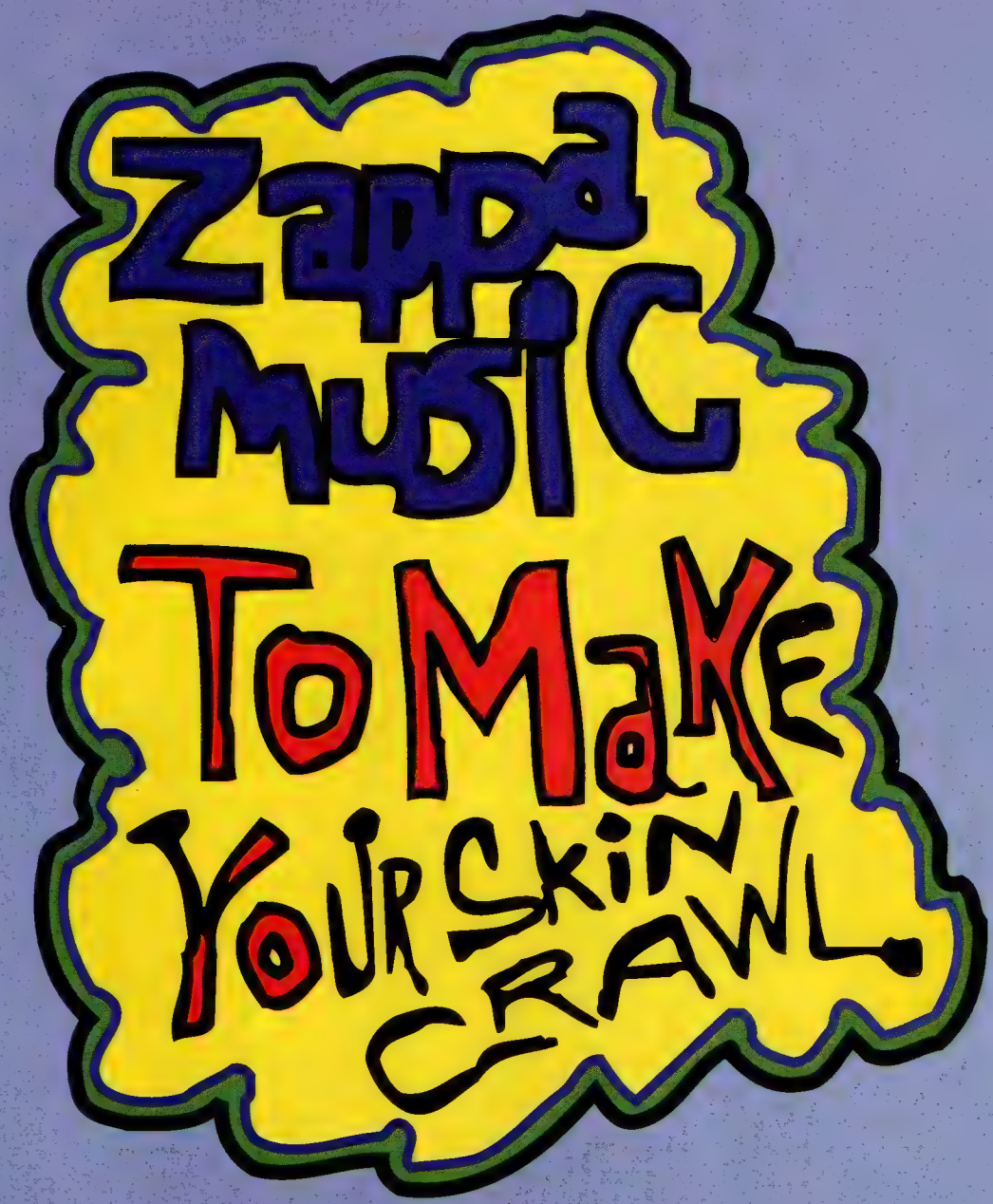
No, the shape of the universe is a Moebius vortex. I believe that. Time is a spherical constant. Now imagine a Moebius vortex inside a spherical constant, and you've got my cosmology. But *when* is very important.

MG: *How does music composition fit into that?*

It's just something that you do. You know, I can do it, so I do it. You can draw cartoons and so you do it, and you can make people laugh and you do it. And that's what you do. And if somebody tried to keep you from doing it, you'd kill them, wouldn't you?

MG: *Yes. See, I judge the universe by pencil mileage.*

That's a pretty linear kind of thing. And the callus on my finger. I used to get that when I wrote with a pen. In fact, this finger right here has a permanent dent right in that bone from just holding that nub of a pen, and going [*choking, struggling sound*] like with those little dots, and now I get cramps in this arm from holding my thumb like this to do a certain move on the keypad to make the Synclavier do something. But in the larger scheme of things, what's a little nub in your finger or a twisted thumb? So long as somebody gets a laugh out of it, what the fuck? Z



"GUITAR WALTZ"

"This is a 12-tone crab canon written when I was 18. There's actually another version for two guitars, so it's a *double* crab canon. I don't know where it is though. I'd been doing 12-tone music for quite some time before I did this, but it was the first time I'd tried to write something for the guitar. I couldn't play it, and I never got to hear it until I got the Synclavier. And because it's printed on the Synclavier, that also means I got to push the button and listen to it. It's kind of short and boring."

— Frank Zappa

"THE GIRL IN THE MAGNESIUM DRESS"

"The arrangement they're playing in Germany is more than just this piano part, of course. It's also got chimes, vibes, marimba, guitar, mandolin, harp, and cymbalom."

— Frank Zappa

THE GIRL IN THE MAGNESIUM DRESS

Frank Zappa

♩= ca. 88

(Pedal indications are approximate)

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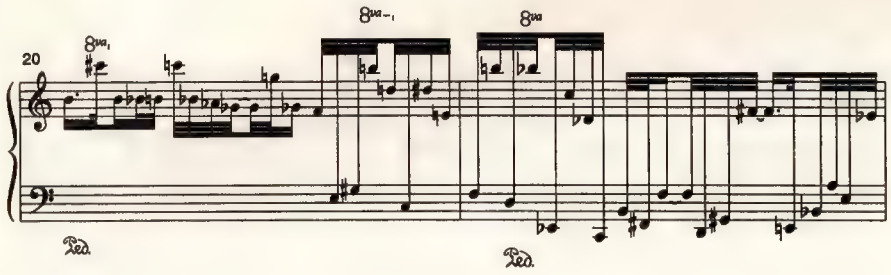
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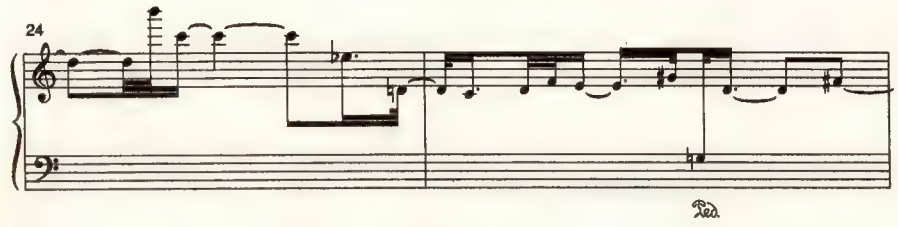
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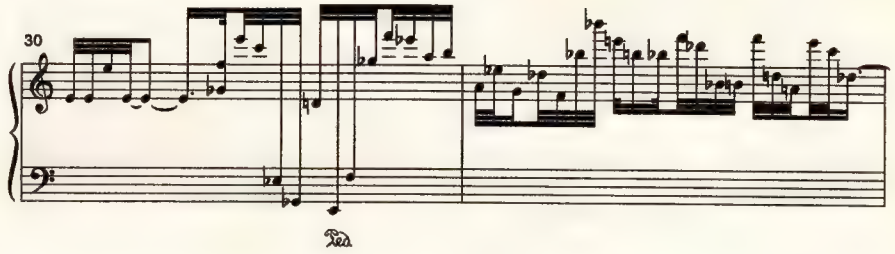
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WALTZ FOR GUITAR

FRANK ZAPPA 12/22/58

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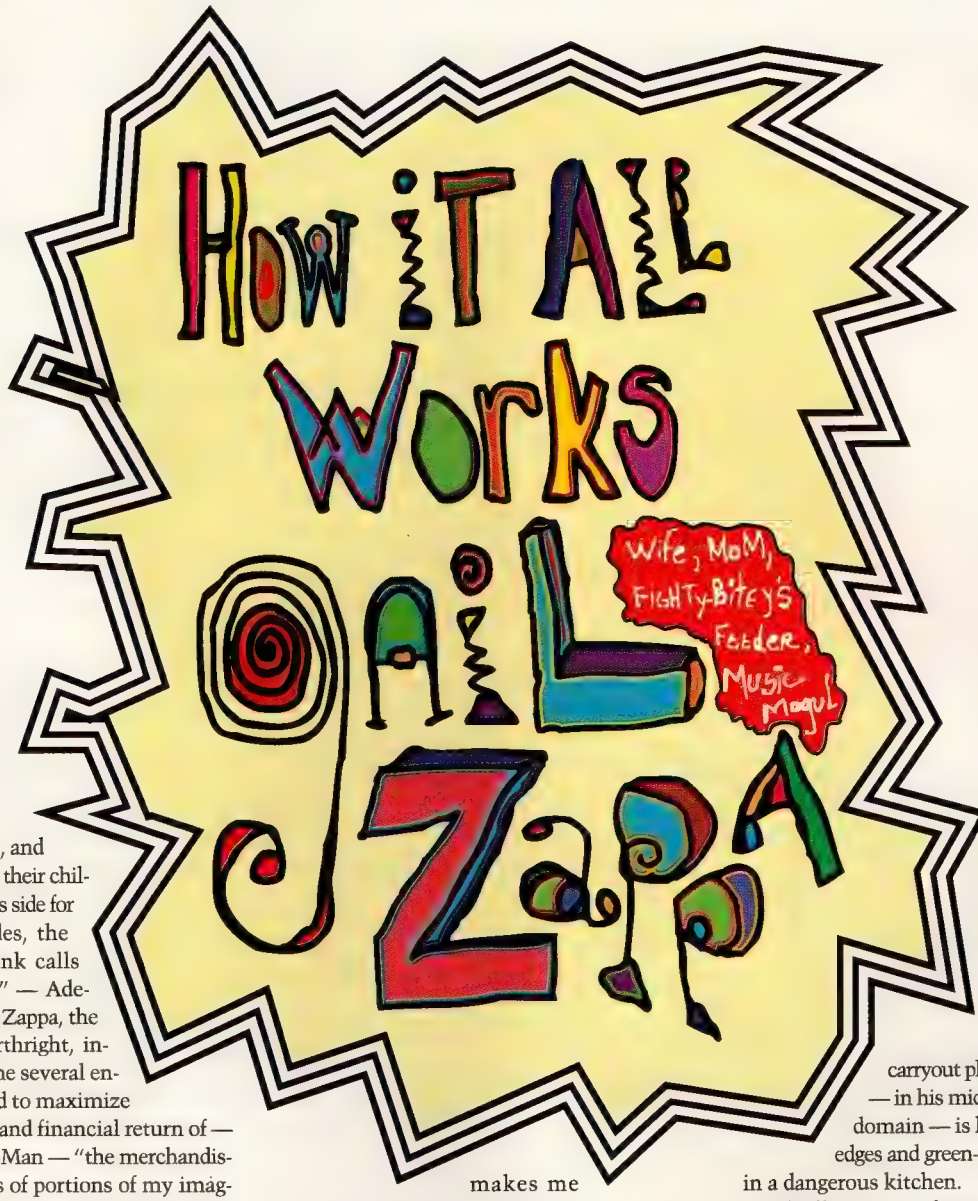
How it All Works



BY DON MENN

Who makes the most happen? First, foremost, and longest — mother of their children, best friend at his side for nearly three decades, the woman whom Frank calls "my fabulous wife" — Adelaide Gail Sloatman Zappa, the brilliant, funny, forthright, intense boss-lady of the several enterprises established to maximize the artistic control and financial return of — in the words of The Man — "the merchandisable manifestations of portions of my imagination." Sharing Frank's unshakable ethics, total commitment, sharp wit, sense of fair play, and unwillingness to suffer fools, Gail seems crucial, irreplaceable, and way too humble about it.

She is not a musician. She was raised to be a nice Catholic girl. Is she that now? "Not at all," she smiles. She likes rock and roll — especially by Frank Zappa. "My first date with Frank was the first time I heard him play," she recalls. "And I was stunned because it was so ballsy. It was this enormous, powerful sound. I just didn't believe it. It's an attitude. It's something with, as Frank puts it, 'eyebrows on it.'"

Gail still loves his music. "A lot," she emphasizes. "It makes me laugh. Nothing else makes me laugh like that."

She and Frank ended up together with four kids and a sometimes difficult time of it, which is why they run things on their own now. Why she's in charge of what she calls "our cottage industry," which itself is an understatement, since she's overseeing a record label with 60 titles, two publishing companies, a mail-order firm with Zappa "dry goods," a video production company, accountants, bankers, and lawyers, all while trying daily to attend to Moon, Dweezil, Ahmet, and Diva; pay the day laborers and construction guys; help Doggus — the "thousand-year-old dog" — haul her weakened ass up the stairs; get that fussy cat Fighty-Bitey fed and everyone else's damn dinner ordered before the carryout places close and Frank — in his midnight haunt of their domain — is left with only sharp edges and green-encrusted foodstuffs in a dangerous kitchen.

She'll point out things such as she didn't start the record company, that Frank is president of everything, and so forth. But the truth is, it's her show now, and a lot of it she set up on her own at a horrible time in their life when their finances were tied up because of lawsuits and when as a result of the PMRC Zappa was singled out as its first sticker-ee, causing record distribution to be abruptly curtailed.

Why did the Zappas decide to handle all these things themselves? Trouble from without, yes, but also just good business sense. The dif-

ference between what a person makes on the artist royalty versus what the record company makes every time an artist's record is sold is enormous. They chose enormous — and with it the grunt work and drudgery of actually running a company with multiple divisions.

Gail describes their entities as follows:

"Barking Pumpkin is a dba ["doing business as"] of Pumpko Industries. It is a real record company, although a tiny one. Some record outlets carry the records, some refuse, so we have a backup. Because we want to make the entire catalog available, you can call the hotline [(818) PUMPKIN] and get whatever you can't find in a store. Munchkin Music is a publishing company — all of Frank's catalog is in either Munchkin Music (ASCAP) or Frank Zappa Music (BMI). We do all the licensing.

"Barfko-Swill is a dba for Intercontinental Absurdities. That's the mail-order stuff. We also have a deal with Rhino Records, which does the boxed set of bootlegs (*Beat the Boots!*). They've just released the second boxed set. Rykodisc licenses about 30 titles on CD in the U.S. and Japan. Music For Nations distributes the Frank Zappa catalog in Europe.

"Once Frank has made a master, then we take over. He's the artist. Most of the artistic decisions are made by him, but all the production stuff is done by me and my friendly assistant Mark Holdom. There's no way to predict the flow of the day. That's something that moms are used to. The subject can change at any time for any reason with no warning.

"Cover art comes from artists who seem to appear from nowhere. Perhaps the longer you hang around on this planet, the more heavy metal you absorb in your system, and the more magnetism you generate to attract the things you need.

"I wasn't involved in the initial stages of Barking Pumpkin. ICA — Intercontinental Absurdities — had existed since '68. Frank's had various kinds of record deals — everything from independent production companies to artist deals on major labels. Since the '70s, he has been the owner of his own label, with distribution handled by other companies. Barking Pumpkin was formed in about 1982. Before that, he had Zappa Records.

"Management — it was perceived as a necessary part of doing business at the time. Frank, along with a lot of people, had managers, and everyone was attempting to improve their deals as they went forward in whatever way they could, in the same way that today Michael Jackson or Madonna or whoever wants to have their own version of 'The Fabulous Deal.' The same stuff has always gone on, but the difference was, in those days, nobody knew the rules. There were none, because the business was in the process of being invented. Definitely, a pioneering effort was being made when Frank went independent, but he would probably not give himself 100% of the credit. That was one of the few good things that came out of the relationship with his first manager.

"I really wasn't playing a significant role in terms of the business early on. I was and am a mom. And I prefer that. I really wasn't in a position to get involved in the business. I didn't even know what questions to ask in terms of, 'How do you do this?' or, 'What's going on?' We were involved in litigation with a major record company. We were virtually prevented from having an income by them. They froze us out. We were an insignificant entity facing this huge corporation. They had Frank's earnings tied up in order to prevent us from fighting them, and on top of that we were fighting old managers.

"I realized we were going to be in a position where we weren't going to have a lot of money because the legal fees at that point were just phenomenal. Plus we had a lot of money tied up with the current management. So I started a mail-order company.

"People were, in those days, trying to decide whether they were going to go with Apple or IBM for business purposes. I didn't know anything about computers, and no one in our organization did either. So I thought, 'Well, what do I do now?' I barely knew how to type. I saw an article in the *Wall Street Journal* about business hardware, and called the people who had been interviewed from these big corporations. Some of these people

WARNER MUSIC
INTERNATIONAL

March 4, 1992

Mr. Mark Holdom
Barking Pumpkin Records
11917 Vose Street
North Hollywood, CA 91605

Dear Mr. Holdom:

As a follow-up to our recent telephone conversation, I am writing to confirm Warner Music International's interest in inviting Mr. Frank Zappa to be the special Guest Speaker at our Worldwide Managing Directors' Conference, which will be held in Boston, Massachusetts, June 15th - 18th, 1992.

This occasion marks the first time that we have invited anyone outside of our organization to address the participants at this meeting, who are comprised of the Presidents, Managing Directors, and Chairmen of our 38 affiliates worldwide, as well as the Chairmen of our U.S. record labels (Warner Bros., Elektra Entertainment, Atlantic Records).

The selection of Mr. Zappa is the choice of our Chairman, Mr. Ramon Lopez, who discerns that Mr. Zappa's unique perspective of the industry could, through an effective address, offer positive insights to our senior management team.

Rather than structure Mr. Zappa's address, Mr. Lopez would prefer to set up an informal meeting - perhaps during his next U.S. visit -- an occasion on which the two could chat about various topics and concerns. Mr. Zappa would then be able to define the basis for his address, and could develop his own treatment, providing a surprise for us in our Boston meetings.

In consideration of Mr. Zappa's activities on behalf of this proposal, Warner Music International is pleased to suggest an honorarium of US$10,000. In addition, we would, of course, provide roundtrip transportation and accommodation during Mr. Zappa's stay in Boston.

If you would be so kind as to contact me at the office number listed above at your earliest convenience to confirm receipt of this letter, I will be happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Thank you for your efforts in forwarding this proposal on to Mr. Zappa. We look forward to the possibility of welcoming him as our guest speaker in Boston.

Best regards,

Tracy Nicholas Bledsoe
Vice President
Press & Public Relations

TNB:aa
cc: R. Lopez

wouldn't pick up the phone and others did. One guy who did was really helpful and cool, and on his recommendation I decided to buy IBM, and we became computerized.

"Frank was on the road, so I called him, and I said that I needed some money for a computer. He said I could have $2,000. I borrowed $12,000. I bought two computers and a bunch of supplies and T-shirts, and had the logo done that said, "Barking Pumpkin," and I plugged a mailing list into the computer from fan mail that nobody was doing anything with. I made the $12,000 back right away. I set up this company, which we called Barfko-Swill, which Frank named. I had my sister, and this guy who worked for Frank in production, and myself, and we sat on our living room floor stuffing envelopes full of T-shirts. We did a mailing that asked, 'What's your interest?' kind of things to all these people. We got a better than 25% return. In mail order, you're lucky to get 5%. So we said, 'Okay, that's it!' The first couple of years, we did ridiculous business, and I have to say thank you to everybody out there who helped us, really, literally, by supporting the product.

"Frank was very opposed to the dry goods business. He said what people really wanted more than anything else was more record product, and he was right, so that's what we focused on. Consequently, we don't have a lot of *stuff*. It's funny — I have stacks of mail from people who want to support Frank for president, but we don't have anything to do with those bumper stickers of 'Zappa For President.' What we've really focused on, basically, is being an alternative source for recorded material with just a few T-shirts. But that kept us from being on the streets, literally, because we could pay our bills and that was our operating capital, and that's when I said, 'Fuck this, I want to be independent.'

"You see, in about 1984, we'd gotten into a situation where we were really subsidizing Frank's manager. He owed us a lot of money, and so in order to keep the business going we were taking care of all his outstanding debts, and I was getting very agitated with that. Things weren't working in an efficient way. Frank was on the road, and the shit hit the fan.

"He fired the manager, and I took over the business, and the first thing I did was fire everybody that worked for us. The lawyers, accountants — I just said, 'That's it, I don't want any help from any of those people,' and went out and found replacement parts. I took over in 1985, and it was trial by fire. It took several years to get through the outstanding nasties.

"I had the mail-order company going nearly two years when we were putting together a deal for new masters to be released through MCA. This was the ugly summer when the PMRC formed. Actually, it was before they called themselves the PMRC, but a letter was sent out to the RIAA signed by a large number of Washington wives who used their husbands' names — Mrs. James Baker, Mrs. John Danforth, Mrs. Albert Gore — as opposed to their own. Something like 11 or 12 of these women were married to prominent Congressmen. They were not thrilled about the current state of the music industry, or maybe they were having problems with their children and were looking for someone to blame it on. Parents Music Resource Center is what they called themselves.

" We were manufacturing records for a distribution deal with MCA, and they called and said, 'You've got to sticker the record.' (A woman in quality control had heard *Thing Fish*.) As far as I know, before then, no one else had been asked to sticker their material. That was the origin of Frank's 'Warrant/Guarantee' sticker. MCA still wasn't satisfied. Maybe they'd been asked to actually censor. Whatever, they cancelled Frank's contract in 1984. A year later he went to face the Senate. It was funny, because he was in a suit. Prior to that, people didn't have a perception of Frank as a businessman. But here he was appearing as a citizen of the United States.

"The thing that's absurd is people say, 'Are you for or against censorship?' That's not the issue. The issue is, do you support the Constitution of the United States or *not*? Because demanding censorship is not in support of what the Constitution provides. Thomas Jefferson, or one of those guys, said, 'The price of liberty is *eternal* vigilance.' It's not a battle you can win.

* * * *

"We may be fairly unique. It's only recently that people started putting out more than one record every 18 months. We've survived on several titles per year. The record companies — distributors, really — have recognized that there's money to be made by distributing smaller labels rather than maintaining all the support staff that goes along with signing new acts. They all say, 'Let someone else do that and have that headache, and we'll just get paid for distribution.' They're all so huge, they don't want to refocus their attention away from where they're making what they call 'solid money' from a handful of artists that have chart action and airplay.

"I do everything that a business manager would do. Frank has a reputation as an artist anyway — that wasn't an issue. I've found that everything can be negotiated. Especially in politics, where even the truth can be negotiated. The main thing I learned from Frank is that you can do anything if you can say, 'No.' If you can walk away, you can have it all.

"The thing I like the most about what I do is that I don't have to compromise my ethics. I have a total choice in whether I want to do something or not. Of course, there are risks, always. But I haven't yet been in a situation where I had to compromise what I believe is the right thing to do. We're entrepreneurs. There's no job security here, absolutely zilch. What Frank does is totally unrequired in America today. He puts little dots on a piece of paper. But he has no choice. When you're a composer, you can't *do* anything else. What else could he do that would make him feel it is worth sticking around? That's what he *does*. We can't survive if we have to rely on huge record companies that don't care about composers. Because that's what I'm married to. He's a composer first.

"There are other masters. There's a whole other catalog that exists that people have never heard that Frank has written in the Synclavier mode. *Jazz from Hell*, by whatever fluke, won a Grammy. Except for one track, it is primarily Synclavier and was a very successful album. That and *Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention*. They were surprisingly successful. We say 'surprisingly' because we always thought, 'The fans are not going to like the Synclavier stuff as much as the live performances.' But it's not true. There's an audience for everything Frank does."

* * * *

So that's how things have evolved to date. Frank and Gail met, fell in love, got married, got raked over the coals by the world, nearly starved, broke free, worked hard, became independent, survived, flourished, remained ethical, remain under assault, but now needn't worry so much about hose jobs — in large part because of Gail Zappa's daily grind.

"Speaking of world hose jobs," Frank says, "my arch-enemy in the music industry for years was Warner Brothers. One of the funny things recently is a letter I received from a Warner executive, who is above Mo Ostin in the International Division. Now my favorite comment, when I'm watching the news on TV, is, 'It's the end of the world.' And while I'm editing, Gail walked in with this thing in her hand, and she said, 'You're right. It *is* the end of the world. Look at this.' And she read this letter to me — and my jaw was just on the floor. I couldn't believe it. The guy was offering me a five-figure sum to lecture their executives on what's wrong with their company! On one hand, it was a great temptation to tell these people where to sit on it, but on the other hand, why should I give them suggestions that would make Time-Warner more efficient at the job of stultifying the brains of the entire human race?"

The offer was rescinded. The world was saved.

And why did Frank call the label "Barking Pumpkin"?

"That's an easy one," the man who names things says. "Gail used to smoke. Before she quit, she coughed all the time. I had always referred to her as my pumpkin, and so at that point she was a barking pumpkin."

A very important person with a company named after her by the man who loves her. **Z**

UTILITY MUFFIN RESEARCH KITCHEN

HE'S ON HIS OWN. HE'S HAD NO CHOICE. HE WORKS OUT OF HIS GARAGE.

Blacklisted from radio and jailed for obscenity, stopped at state borders and stickered out of record bins, pickpocketed by executives and dumped by their conglomerates, Frank Zappa had to tunnel out his own environment to survive as an artist, a citizen, and a provider for his family.

His home is his castle. And his studio. And his office. And his archive. This is where everything happens. He don't drive. He don't disco. He rarely leaves the house — this incision into and construct on a Southern California hill, where building has continued for a decade. Imagine a feudal estate — but now down in Tinsel Town — *his* Rebellion, self-contained, alive with workers, a place he never *has* to leave. A bit Swiss Family Robinson — light and airy, what with the bridge and trees and the fire pole dropping from Ahmet's room to a downstairs shower. A bit Von Frankenstein with the stone and metal stairways, braided wires hanging in bundles, lighting low and constant noon and midnight, the buzz and hum and crackle of electricity from device to device, chamber to chamber. A missile silo aglow with CRTs beaming radiation. Willie Wonka's factory and Pee-Wee Herman's Playhouse with audio-visual oddities on every wall and surface.

By Don Menn

PHOTOS BY: Paul Haggard

DAVE DONDORF

SPENCER CHRISLU

ALI ASKIN

TODD YVEGA

SIMON PRENTIS

MARQUE COY

HARRY ANDRONIS

VAN CARLSON

All that comes out of Zappa's relentless brain is realized here, within these gates, between these walls, massaged and jolted by the people who roam or reside herein, using an exotic array of implements and armaments. On the following pages, his key staff reveals what goes on in this "home studio." ➤ ➤ ➤

DAVE SURROUNDED BY THE TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

Dave Dondorf

in The Utility Muffin Research Kitchen: It Breaks, He Fixes

"I'M ONE OF THE WORLD'S WORST guitar players," Dave "Tree Hugger" Dondorf confesses. "I originally cajoled my parents into purchasing me an electric and my cheesy one-tube amp, and proceeded to terrorize the neighborhood until I blew up the one tube. And then I fixed the amplifier."

Thus began his career first as a roadie "hauling B-3s up to third-floor clubs," and eventually as chief technician for Frank Zappa. "Frank makes fun of me because I'm outside all the time, and he thinks that is insanity," Dave states. "I'm a vegetarian, mountain biker and climber, and an environmental whiner. I especially love winter mountaineering. I go on snowshoe trips by myself in avalanche country. It's not like I'm hoping to end up in one of those *L.A. Times* stories where someone says, 'Yep, we dug him out in the spring.' I really watch what I'm doing. But to be in the forest, 20 miles away from the nearest human being, in the dead of winter, it's just one the best things that you can possibly do. You're so free. Most people say, 'You're insane.' I find it really exhilarating. Frank and I agree that the world is going to hell, but he has his particular group of reasons and I have my own, and he just likes to make fun by telling me to go hug a tree. His taking some of his valuable time to wind me up is actually a compliment."

Loving being alone is nothing new for Dondorf. Born and raised in Providence, Rhode Island, where he lived until he was 16, Dondorf ended up in Chicago with his family, and he moved out not long thereafter, looking for an opportunity. "That's what life is about: looking for opportunities," he says. "It was the Sixties and, more than a lot of people, I knew *everything*. The friction with my parents — who were also under the impression that they knew everything — just was too great. They had raised me to think for myself, and when I started to assert that, they tried to stuff the genie back into the bottle, and it wouldn't go. So I left. I always hear people talk about working their way through college. I worked my way through high school *and* college."

It was also the era of student radicalism, and Dondorf was active in the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and edited the high school underground newspaper. "I got my FBI file once," he recalls. "It was hilarious. There were actually chunks of it blacked out for national security reasons. Then, at one point, the logic of dedicating my life to some giant struggle to make the world a better place ceased to make sense. I said, 'I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make *my* life a good place to be.'

Though he stayed in Chicago for the next 16 years, Dondorf eventually moved to Los Angeles with band in search of a fortune and fame that never happened. He be-

"THE CITY HATED OUR LARGE ECHO, BECAUSE IT'S THE WRONG SHAPE, AND THERE'S NO STAIRWAY, AND THEY FINALLY DECIDED THAT IT'S A ROOM. YOU CAN'T BUILD A ROOM WITHOUT A WINDOW IN L.A. SO IT'S A ROOM. SO IT HAS A WINDOW. IT'S CONFIGURED WITH SIX-CHANNEL RETURNS, BUT CURRENTLY ONLY STEREO SENDS INTO IT. ALL MICROPHONES ARE CROWN PZMS: TWO DISH MICS AND FOUR PLATES."

FRANK'S "FELLOWS VOLUTONE" RECORD PLAYER DWARFS HIS 1987 GRAMMY AWARD FOR "BEST ROCK INSTRUMENTAL" AND THE BARKING PUMPKIN LOGO INSCRIBED ON THE PLAQUE BENEATH THE BELL.

"THE BASEMENT" SECTION OF ZAPPA'S STUDIO IS USED FOR LISTENING TO SIX-CHANNEL MIXES, EDITING ON THE SONIC SOLUTIONS, AND REVIEWING THE COUNTLESS HOURS OF FILM AND VIDEO ACCUMULATED OVER HIS CAREER.

came a shop manager at Audio Technics, the P.A. company, and did stints on their behalf with Chicago, the Everly Brothers, Suzanne Somers, and Kenny Loggins, among others.

He ended up with Frank Zappa by chance when a friend passed a rumor along that Frank needed a new technician for the '88 tour. "I got the call from the production manager, and I was *gone*," Dondorf recalls. "I was third peon from the bottom, making sure everyone's anything worked. It was very difficult, because things had deteriorated nastily. Frank's guitar rig was very old. The heart was a pedal board that had hundreds of little relays, quarter-inch jacks, and little circuit boards wrapped up in duct tape just piled in there — nothing labelled, nothing documented. If there was a hum or a buzz, there was no way to tell why. Here was one of the world's foremost guitarists, who people pay large amounts of money to go see, and he's playing through these little crappy boxes. Frank is so receptive to technical change, it's ridiculous. I can't believe this was anything other than inertia." Even so, Dondorf managed to keep things running, and after the end of the tour, Frank called to offer him full-time work.

"So my being here was really serendipity," Dave says. "The beauty has been that I was just given the job and told to do something with it. After the first few months, Frank quit asking me, 'What did you get done today?' or, 'What are you doing next week?' I come in, I work like a little bee, I go home, and he doesn't have a clue. I basically treat the place as if he said, 'It's your studio, make it right.' To me, that's really creative."

Dondorf's major accomplishments include having assembled all the components of Zappa's revolutionary six-channel surround system used in Germany; helping Marque Coy on the installation of equipment, racks, and wiring for the creation of Joe's Garage; and the entire rewiring of Frank's personal studio.

"If the six-channel system works, it's going to be something new, something no one has heard before. If it's a triumph, I'm a part of a history-making experiment. If it doesn't work, I wasn't even there," he laughs.

The studio was equally challenging. "The level of connectivity in there is truly remarkable," Dave explains. "*Everything* is in sync. I went at this from the standpoint that I hated the way it had been wired. The original wiring

FRANK ZAPPA AS RUSSIAN DOLLS WITHIN DOLLS WITHIN DOLLS - GIFTS FROM A FAN.

THE PRIMARY RECORDING AREA OF THE STUDIO. ON THE FLOOR BESIDE THE COUCH IS THE PROTOTYPE OF THE HOOP USED FOR ZAPPA'S SIX-CHANNEL PERFORMANCE IN GERMANY. SMALLER ROOMS ADJOIN FOR RECORDING DRUMS, GUITARS, OR EVEN FRANK'S VOICE AS FOR THE RECENT *REN & STIMPY* EPISODE WHEN HE PLAYED THE POPE.

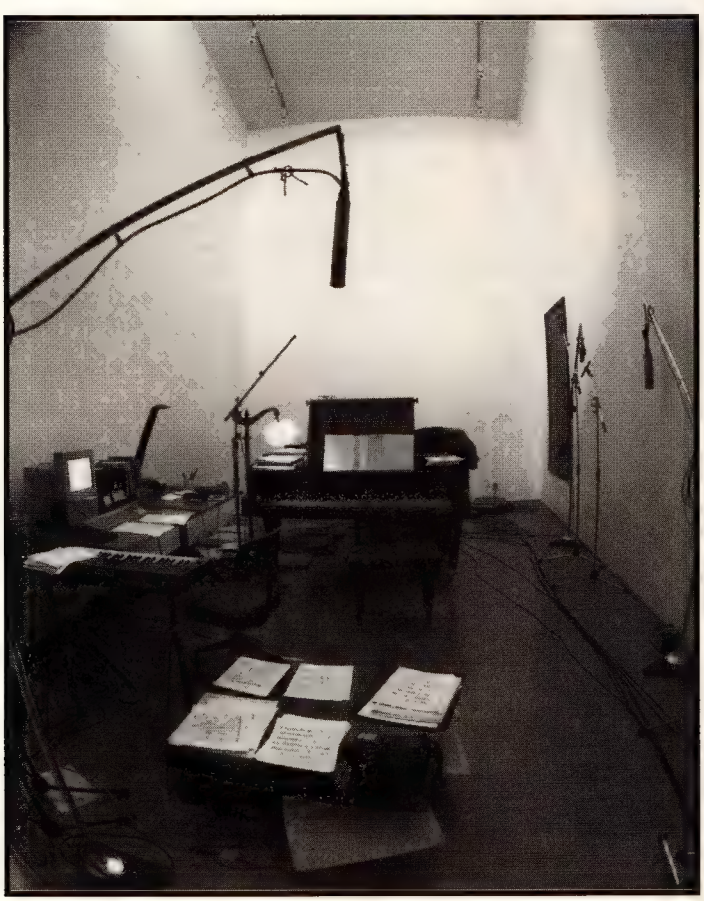
may not have been bad, and I don't want to have anybody coming back and hitting me and saying, "You said I was bad." It's just that there's been a whole series of people who've worked for Frank, and each one had implemented their own ideas in various degrees. I wanted to start fresh, so I virtually yanked everything. The most difficult thing about rewiring was that I had to do it in a very short time. Frank took the family to Spain for a week. When he left there was one studio, when he came back it was a completely different studio, and everything was new."

As to what Frank expects from him, Dondorf states simply: "He wants everything right. He wants it to work. He doesn't want to have to wait while you make it work, although — unlike a lot of spoiled artists — Frank understands that sometimes you just can't have everything. In each of the things I do, there are people who are better. The trick for me is to be as good as possible in one person in many different things. You start talking to people who have worked for Frank, and they go, 'You've worked for Frank for four *years*? Whoo!' Yes, he's very demanding, but not in a petulant, childish, rockstar way."

To make it right is often difficult. Dondorf continues: "Frank has the ability to generate more ideas than anyone could keep up with. I fill rooms full of yellow pads with things Frank would like to do. Sometimes I just have to guess what's really important, but occasionally I get caught."

Responsibilities today involve putting out fires and doing routine maintainence. "When a problem pops up its head," he says, "I try to bang it back down. Power losses occur sometimes, usually due to wind or bad drivers. Last week one of the transformers in front blew up and was literally raining little bits of molten metal. We can get back up and running in 15 minutes if Spence, Todd, and I are all here. Our console is completely automated, so when it loses power, it forgets a lot of things. It re-powers back up in a default mode so we have to reset everything. It just amounts to pushing a lot of buttons and scrolling through menus — it's really not that bad. We have very few failures."

Dondorf especially enjoys the background chatter that accompanies his labors. "Frank seems — though you can never tell — to like having me around," he explains. "We have a lot of interesting discussions. I get to listen to his stories, he listens to mine, and we have a lot of political discussions — where the hell is the world going. Those are worth a lot to me. I really don't have a down side to working with Frank. I may be having a charmed life, but generally it's been relatively easy. The best part of working here is it's interesting. It is not a drag, it is not dull, it is not the same thing every day. There's a tremendous amount of freedom. Plus, there's respect. When Frank turns to me and says, 'Dave, how can I do this?' I realize I'm part of a team that's moving things forward." **Z**



ABOVE. VAULT" IT'S CALLED. TWO FEET OF CONCRETE ABOVE THE HEAD, AND THERE ARE THREE OF THEM. THIS IS THE LARGEST. $2,000,000 WORTH OF TAPE – NOT COUNTING WHAT'S RECORDED ON THEM. JUST ONE GUY. "I'VE COLLECTED EVERY INTERVIEW, EVERY PERFORMANCE CLIP, EVERYTHING THAT WAS DONE AROUND THE WORLD THAT I COULD GET A COPY OF," SAYS ZAPPA. "ALL THE MASTERS, ALL THE ROAD TAPES. AND THEN THERE'S VIDEOTAPE – EVERY FORMAT AND ALL STOPS IN BETWEEN. IN ORDER TO PUT IT IN A CONDITION WHERE ANYBODY COULD GO IN THERE AND FIND ANYTHING ANYTIME THEY NEEDED IT, IT WOULD TAKE ABOUT A YEAR AND A BAR-CODE GENERATOR."

LEFT. PREPARING SCORES FOR THE ENSEMBLE MODERN, ALI ASKIN WAS STATIONED NEAR FRANK'S BOSENDORFER, WITH A MACINTOSH SETUP.

SPENCER IN FRONT OF THE NEVE CONSOLE

SPENCER CHRISLU

Engineer Of The Right Formulas In The Baby Milk Factory

"THE MOTTO AROUND HERE is 'Anything, Any Place, Any Time, For No Reason At All,'" laughs Spencer Chrislu, Zappa's in-house engineer. "Whatever keeps things fun and loose and interesting, and it can change instantly. I love the variety. Frank is outrageously creative. All day long, 24 hours a day, thoughts flow in and out of his mind, and it's my job to try and flesh them out. He'll go up and take a nap and come back down to tell me of one of the things that came to him in a dream. That's how he came up with the Hoop [*see page 37*] — it came to him while he was asleep."

Born in Minneapolis, Chrislu followed a path that meandered to Laurel Canyon through Nashville (where he engineered religious records). Struck by the clarity of Steely Dan albums, Spence says that from childhood he simply wanted to be "the guy who made things sound good." Two years ago, following the departure of Zappa's long-time engineer Bob Stone, Spence was recruited, on the recommendation of Todd Yvega, to man Zappa's Neve console, where he now sits ten hours a day, five days a week (he also does freelance scoring and mixing for such television programs as *Sisters*).

"There was no big learning curve here," Chrislu says. "Just about a week. My first test with Frank was to see if I could build the sound in the digital domain of his piano room with a wood floor and plaster walls that go up about 20 feet — a lot of hard sound. Then we spent some time remixing Ensemble stuff to see if I had an ear for avant-garde classical music. Then we did some rock and roll for *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore*. I did a remix while he was gone, and he liked what he heard. So he was very happy, and I was very happy, and we've been rolling along ever since."

Though sometimes Frank is at his side from the first fader move, he generally leaves him alone on initial mixes. "Frank and I both listen to things very much the same way," Spence states. "Neither of us likes drums coming off the top of a mountain. We like a drum to sound like a drum, a band to sound like a band. I go to the symphony just to keep my memory refreshed on what live acoustical music, in a real air space, sounds like, so that when I get back in the studio, I can try to recreate *that*. I love imaging in a sound field. I love placing images in specific areas, areas not only left to right but also back to front. This new six-channel material in and of itself is an imaging system you can only dream of."

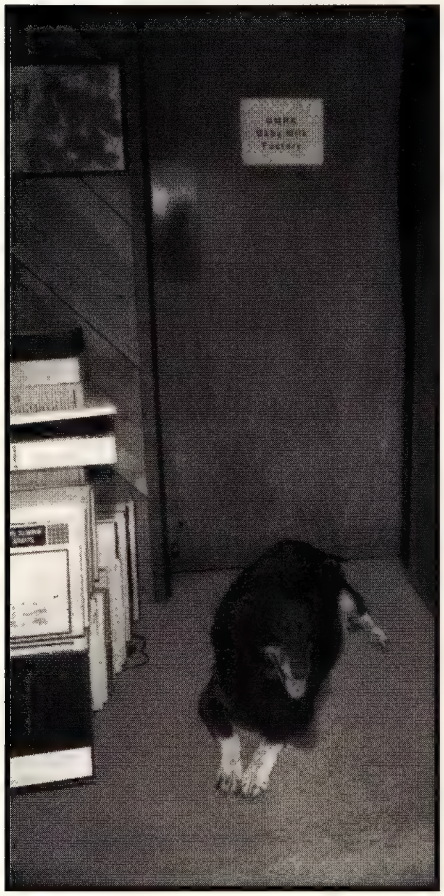
Having sat at SSL boards before, facing Frank's digital Neve with "flying fader" technology was not that disorienting for Chrislu. "I just had to learn the layout," he explains. "On the SSL, you have 'Float Function,' which is called 'Changeover' on the Neve. But basically, all consoles work the same." In particular, he likes the Neve's ability to memorize settings for EQ, routing, panning — whatever. "We have been able to standardize settings for where reverbs come up, where tape comes up, and on which faders," he explains. "That's made it possible to have good linear alignment between the years. The '88 band all tends to sound one way, because it was recorded the same. The same with the '82 band or any of the others. So I can take anything from one of those groupings with a set EQ, just dial it up in less than an hour, and it'll be close to right. All we have to do is tweak for a particular song or venue. The track layouts are the same. Ike Willis' vocal is here, Frank's guitar is there. It comes up the same, with the same echo settings, everything. So I save that much time, and we can get right into mixing and balancing."

The hardest part of the job is what everyone who works with Zappa indicates: "He works harder than anyone else I've ever worked with," Chrislu smiles. "Don't get me wrong, we have a blast and take plenty of breaks, but he works harder, listens harder, and concentrates harder than anyone else I've ever known. It's a challenge for me to keep up with him. The volume of things to do around here is just huge, ungodly, immense, unbelievable!"

And not all that work is focused on CD mastering. Zappa is a video fanatic who spends significant amounts of time recording, reviewing, and editing events of the day as seen on television

as well as from his own life. His three "vaults" are filled with audio and video documentation of his entire career, as well as row upon row of such recent events as the Los Angeles riots (recorded on seven different channels) and the *entire* war with Iraq as broadcast on CNN. "It's like we're archiving the end of the world," Chrislu says.

Not having been that familiar with Zappa's work before he was hired, Spence considers his lack of familiarity an asset. "I think that's one of the things Frank likes about me," he explains.



DOGGUS - THE 1,000-YEAR-OLD-DOG - GUARDS THE DOOR TO THE "BABY MILK FACTORY" OF THE UTILITY MUFFIN RESEARCH KITCHEN.

"I don't come in with any preconceived notions of how things are supposed to sound. Frank says it's interesting for him to see someone entirely new take all this on. And now I'm finding all these wonderful gems that I get to hear for the first time on the mixing console and put back together myself."

Chrislu has worked on the classical CD reissues of *The Perfect Stranger* and the *London Symphony Orchestra* albums, Frank's work with the Ensemble Modern, as well as rock and roll material for *You Can't Do That Onstage Anymore, The Man from Utopia,* and the forthcoming *Lumpy Gravy, Phaze III.* He says he notices a distinct growth in Frank as a composer. "Just listen to 'Envelopes' and 'Theme to Lumpy Gravy' — interesting and accessible polyrhythmic themes. The new material has evolved way beyond even that. He is always stretching."

Chrislu plainly loves what he's doing. "This *is* my image of a utopian situation. I go to a place where I work on something different every day, that's challenging musically and creatively but also offers me the ability to put in my two cents — and to have that input understood and considered and discussed. My relationship with my boss goes beyond just a working relationship. Frank never raises his voice. He's never critical or abusive in any way. Every day, while we're working, we talk about what's happening in the news, what's going on politically, what we see and what we hear, and it's just great — almost a second home."

In a way, it's spoiled Chrislu for his other jobs. "Working in stereo, just plain two channels, is becoming boring," he sighs. "Now that Frank has the six-channel, surround-sound environment he's always wanted, he's loving it to death, and his recent recordings of a guy playing spoons spinning around the room is really stellar stuff, really quite exciting. Got to get it *around* you!" **Z**

THE FRANK ZAPPA COMFORTABLE-FOR-SITTING-AND-SMOKING-AND-LISTENING CHAIR.

FRANK'S SYNCLAVIER 9600 WORKSTATION SITS DIAGONALLY ACROSS FROM THE NEVE VIRGO CONSOLE. FOR MORE COMPLETE TECHNICAL DETAILS SEE KEYBOARD MAGAZINE IN EARLY '93.

ALI HOLDING A PIECE OF PAPER

Ali Askin

Just Another Turkish-Bavarian Music Preparation Specialist

SEATED BEHIND FRANK ZAPPA at Joe's Garage, in blistering heat and a cloud of smoke from European cigarettes, is one Ali N. Askin, the Ensemble Modern's appointed copyist. Askin spent two weeks in a music dictation nightmare, typing in the blur of notes as the assembled virtuosi imitated and expanded upon ideas improvised on guitar by Zappa.

Askin has the appealing and appalling challenge of making arrangements for Zappa's contribution to the Frankfurt Festival in September. Besides the new material produced with the Ensemble last summer, Askin is working as an arranger, creating new versions of Zappa standards. Most difficult of all, he has been asked to make some of Frank's most rhythmically and melodically complex music from the Synclavier playable by human musicians.

A pianist from an early age and a composer in his own right, Askin is well prepared for these tasks. Little about even Zappa's most onerous "serious" music daunts him. "I'm very much into notation because I've been working as a copyist for so many publishers," he explains. A graduate in composition from the Munich Academy, he continues to perform everything from traditional classical music to modern pop in jazz and rock bands, write and arrange for local theaters and television stations, and serve as an accompanist for ballet and opera classes. "In modern music you cannot make a living just composing," he says. "You have to do something else."

When the Ensemble Modern decided to feature Zappa at the Frankfurt Festival, because of his prior association with the group, Askin received the call to come and start preparing scores — on the spot. "It was fantastic, just fantastic," he recalls. "Frank had the idea to assemble so-called music objects — just dictating chords or lines on the guitar and getting the Ensemble to imitate them on their instruments. He was composing while playing, trying every possibility. The musicians wrote down what Frank dictated or what he told them to improvise, and I was sitting there with my small keyboard and writing it down also. And then I went through everyone's stuff and compared what I had written with what they had written, and we finally came up with the best version."

Ali had done most of his earlier copyist chores by hand or by Atari computer equipped with Amadeus software. For the Zappa project, he switched to a Macintosh IIci with Coda Finale software. "Frank is getting into something really fantastic now," he says. "He does a lot of hocketing on the Synclavier. You might have a line of sixteenth-notes, where one instrument is playing the first sixteenth, and a second instrument is playing the next one, and so forth. This is impossible for musicians to play. The Synclavier makes it possible to do it with very complicated tuplets, and then moving it in space with the six-channel mix just blows out your mind."

Besides creating finished scores in conventional notation, Askin is also now transcribing earlier Zappa recordings for new arrangements. In particular, he cites a Bruce Fowler trombone line doubling a Zappa guitar solo where one layer is recorded at half-speed and then speeded up to sound like a trumpet. "Frank wanted me to transcribe it so he can maybe use it for some composition where it might be played by a viola, for example. There's another very nice piece with just Frank and someone else on acoustic guitars which someone has now played into the Synclavier, and Frank is thinking about possibly using that as a solo piece for strings. He's always experimenting with taking solos of his earlier works, having them transcribed, and transferring them to another instrument. Some parts are obvious as to which instrument has to play what. The problem is more with the Synclavier music, which is very difficult, often with very fast, tiny high notes that don't always have obvious relations to meters or measures. In general, orchestration and instrumentation are the hardest parts. You have to think about which instrument can play something so it sounds good. Is it in the range? Is it too hard to play? Can it be bowed by strings? I think about it, give my recommendations to Frank, and see what he thinks for a final decision."

Askin works from CDs, DAT tapes, and MIDI files — listening, comparing, typing his interpretation into Finale, and then listening back to what he's done through a Proteus II synth module. "I chose the Proteus because it makes pretty good orchestral sounds," he explains. His screen image — often containing as much as 20 to 24 staves — moves much slower than the audio playback, so he works with printouts during the review process.

All these tasks require a minimum of ten-hour shifts six to seven days a week. "But I enjoy it very much," he emphasizes. "Long hours are not something new to me. I'm having a good time, so it doesn't matter. The thing is, it's *challenging*. Everybody who works with him is challenged to go to their limits. Can you do that? Can you do that? Can you transcribe that?" He's *always* asking for limits. Z

TODD AT THE SYNCLAVIER IN FRANK'S STUDIO

Todd Yvega

Software Surgeon, Sample Trimmer, Smarter Than A Synclavier

"JUST THE *IDEA*," HE BEGINS, "THAT I COULD OPEN A PHONE book 100 years from now, and see a bunch of Yvegas when there never were any before — " and he pauses. "I realized I could create a brand new name that no one's ever had." And that's what he did: He made up his own name. That drive to create permeates everything Todd Yvega (formerly Smith) does. "To me it's just boring to do something that somebody else did," he states. "That's what's so tedious about the stuff I normally get hired to do. You know, 'This song was a hit, so we want it to sound just like this.' Why do it again? It's been done!"

The guy has no fixed job description with Frank Zappa, except to "roll out the red carpet so that somebody can just walk without looking at his feet, remove the obstacles before somebody reaches them." However, he handles such specific chores as programming all the synthesizers in the studio, maintaining all of Frank's printed scores and their variations for rental to orchestras, creating and maintaining databases for all of the audio and video archives, remaining fluent with all software — music and non-music — trimming samples, and actually writing software to make Zappa's Synclavier work more efficiently.

Originally hired to edit sounds for the eventual sale of Frank Zappa's library of thousands of samples, Yvega immediately felt himself swamped. "Everything here is like a life task," he says. "My first day, Frank explained what my responsibilities were, and then heaved all these tasks on my back. It scared me to death, and I almost quit. That's why there are so many unfinished things. One of my laments here is that there's so much to do and so little time to do it. Even just cutting up samples, I could spend a year of 12-hour days. Whenever there's a limit, Frank will always overrun it. If we had ten Syncla-gods working here, Frank would find a way there should have been 12."

A NASA brat, born in California, Todd spent his youth travelling to wherever the space program sent his father. He studied guitar, piano, and drums but grew up sheltered from pop culture by parents who feared its negative influences on their numerous children. "I didn't even discover the Beatles until 1973 — after they broke up! I originally had an image of Frank being a very bad person — disgusting and filthy and having long-haired hippie freak commie-pinko type of ideas."

Todd spent seven years in college, majoring in electrical engineering, music theory, and composition, favoring experimenters such as Henry Cowell and Harry Partch. But when he heard Conlon Nancarrow's pioneering work with player pianos, he knew he'd found a new hero. "It amazes me that someone invents a player piano in the 1800s," Todd says, "and they just use it to play 'Buffalo Girls Won't You Come Out Tonight.' I don't understand why people don't take advantage of technology to do new things. The average musician today has more computing power than sits on the space shuttle, but will only use it to do simple drum beats *ad nauseam*. The thing to do with a player piano or a computer is to experiment with things that wouldn't come naturally based on our upbringing. It's built-in mediocrity that it never occurs to most people to want to do something that's not exactly like what they've already heard. Monkey-see, monkey-do — they see a world around them, want to be a part of it, and do exactly what they've seen others do."

Yvega had little interest in computers until he realized how useful they could be in performing the kind of mathematically complex music that he had been composing. "They're very logical, and that sort of thinking appeals to me — it's clean." Abruptly, he switched to computer science and left college only because he acquired sole custody of

his infant son.

Already known as a synthesizer whiz, he started calling studios, and soon landed the perfect job, working for Herb Pilhoffer, owner of one of the nation's most advanced Synclavier systems. They were very happy times. "These were the days when everyone wanted things to sound different," Yvega recalls. Pilhoffer ended up sending him to a seminar at New England Digital. Discovering Todd's knowledge of spectral analysis, N.E.D. offered him immediate employment, which he turned down. Nevertheless, the impression he had made kept his name at the top of the list of specialists recommended by N.E.D. when Frank Zappa came looking for help a few years later.

Annoyed with the continuing attention given to Synclavier users in Southern California, Yvega grudgingly decided to join the pack. "The only way to move on was to move out," he explains. "I thought the hard part would be to get a job and the easy part to get a house. I got a job in a jiffy and got an ulcer trying to get a place to live." After working for nearly four years at Craig Huxley's Enterprise Studio, in 1988 Todd went solo, producing Japanese idols and making gobs of money which he poured into his own equipment, his own "Syncla-Debt." Not long thereafter, Gail Zappa called.

"I had been in L.A. five or six years, and it had just ground me down to where life wasn't fun," Yvega recalls. "Between jobs, I just vegetated and watched TV and felt shitty. I'd completely forgotten how exciting life can be when you have something like this to do. What I noticed about Frank, right off the bat, was here was the type of guy who just couldn't wait to jump out of bed in the morning and go try that nifty idea he had. That enthusiasm rubbed off on me, and I suddenly found myself just full of all this enthusiasm, and I said, 'Oh, I remember this from the good old college days, the Pilhoffer days, before the real world took away my reason for living.'"

Yvega is so in demand in Hollywood through his own Acme Music Works that he lives in a state of constant guilt for not attending to Frank's needs 'round the clock. His job in studios seems as amorphous as at Zappa's: "to find solutions on the spot rapidly." Clients have included such pop stars as Cheap Trick, Ozzy Osbourne, and Lionel Richie; such films as *Casualties of War*, *The Stepfather*, and *Field of Dreams*; such television programs as *Beverly Hills 90210*, *thirtysomething*, and *Knots Landing*; and such commercials as American Express, 7-Up, and Volkswagen. To date, Yvega feels his most creative assignment was for *Duckman*, an upcoming cartoon aimed at adults. On Frank's recommendation, he was given total creative freedom to arrange bits and bites of Frank's music, as well as create his own with a Zappa ring, as background music for the pilot.

Now let's talk about Yvega's brain. These are not test results. We're merely quoting colleagues. Frank Zappa says, "You've never seen anybody more bookwormish, ectomorphic, or ivory-towered than Todd. He's a computer whiz with a brain as big as a house — a truly mysterious character." Dave Dondorf, Zappa's chief technician, jokes that the great nuclear theoretician of our time, Stephen Hawking, "learned everything he knows from Todd."

All this chaps Todd's hide. "People say I'm really smart. No, I'm not," he insists. "All I did was read the manual. That's something that somehow has escaped everyone else. In fact, it's because I'm *not* smart that I have to do it that way. I see people do all these things that make it difficult. My brain is so limited that I can't let it get complicated. I need it to be clear and organized; otherwise I lose it. So to me, they must be smart if they can handle that haphazard spaghetti code they're running."

Existing software, for which he is responsible, is large but "less than a hundred" packages. "There's no best or worst," he points out. "Everything's like shovels and rakes. If you want to rake leaves, then a rake is the best tool; if you want to dig a hole, the shovel is what you grab. I typically use several pieces of software for one project."

Rewriting software is a different challenge. Yvega creates utilities in XPL (the Synclavier language similar to Pascal) on his expanding menu dubbed "N.E.D. Buster Power Tools." His creations overcome shortcomings in the system software. To date, his tally nears 100, and he writes if more time is wasted by his not writing. "There are a lot of tricks to doing a large amount of work in conveyor-belt fashion," he adds, "so I write software that makes it possible to provide the computer with a whole catalog of stuff to do, and it turns the crank while you go get a sandwich."

When it's time to print out music, one Yvega program removes the "ring over" of any given pitch, which might confuse the software into creating superfluous ties if it were to read the notes as carrying beyond their intended cutoff points. "Frank used to spend hours doing things like this," Todd says, "so I write programs so he doesn't waste his time."

Yvega has also created audio and video databases broken down — sometimes inch by inch — by location, date, version, instrument, person, and any identifiable image that might prove relevant.

His initial job responsibility, trimming samples, is not an activity that necessarily comes naturally. "People seem to pick the wrong starting points," he explains. "There's a tendency to cut in too close to the beginning and miss 'air' — the beginning transient right before the beginning of a sound, that's subtle but critical. If it isn't there, it doesn't sound natural."

In organizing samples from a given instrument, it's also important to make sure that the amplitudes of each pitch are balanced, so Yvega writes programs to scale all pitches to the "ideal" amplitude. "It's stupid for people to have to do things like that," he insists. "People should *think*. Tedious work should be for computers, because they don't mind, and that's what they do without error. People aren't good at doing tedious work because they make mistakes when they have to do repetitive, algorithmic things."

"When I started working here," Yvega continues, "I thought, 'All right! It's Pilhoffer all over again — very intellectually stimulating.' Because the pace was so slow in Minneapolis compared to Los Angeles that we could afford to spend entire days just exploring experimental, Brainiac kinds of things. Whereas in Los Angeles, they'd kick you out the second you attempted it. The clock is always ticking. 'Make it sound just like that record. Gotta make hits!' So arriving at Frank's was a wonderful return to the laboratory, to my happy days of being in college when my whole outlook on everything was from a scholastic point of view, because I thought you did something because it was intellectually stimulating. I wasn't in the world of 'pay the rent' yet.

"Another reason why I love working here is that it isn't like so many of the other things I do, like work on TV shows that are seen next Sunday night, will never be seen again, and will end up in a vault somewhere and be eventually disposed of. This is the one thing I do that I actually feel will mean something in the long run. I definitely think Frank has etched a permanent position as a major composer. He will take several pieces he's been developing over the years and merge them together like a sculptor with a shelf with an arm up here and a head over here. It's amazing how proficient he is, considering that he isn't an avid reader. But he watches somebody do something, and he remembers it. He knows more about the music printing software than anybody I've ever met.

"Frank has a way of exceeding limits that nobody else even approaches. A typical sequence working in the music industry may be around 32 tracks and a few hundred sectors. Here, there can easily be 50 tracks for drums alone and *thousands* of sectors — mind-boggling complexity. So I find ways to use available memory more efficiently. I write programs to remove redundancy. This sort of thing is a problem only here. There are lots of users of Synclavier in video post-production, but that's like using a battleship to cross a river — they're barely using the machine.

"As an employer, Frank is wonderful. He actually listens to his employees' recommendations, and the bottom line is that he likes people to think. If you take the initiative and do something, he usually appreciates it, even if it wasn't what he had in mind. The unspoken rule is, 'If somebody's not in the room, just do it.' He has a reputation of being a taskmaster, and after being away for a while I come in here with my tail between my legs, feeling like I should crawl and beg forgiveness, but he's amazingly understanding and tolerant. He's the best boss I ever had." **Z**

SIMON AND PAUL MCCARTNEY

SIMON PRENTIS

SEMANTIC SCRUTINIZER:

HUMM... HOW SHOW "YELLOW SNOW" IN KANJI?

WHEN SIMON PRENTIS, AT age 24, an exile from his native London, ended up in the ancient agricultural town of Kawagoe, Japan, the only other guys who spoke English were Mormon missionaries, and he wasn't about to hang out with them. He retreated, therefore, into an Aikido dojo, where he slowly learned the Japanese that gave him his present vocation: interpreter for Occidentals trying to understand Orientals and vice versa. Translator, in particular, for Frank Zappa, who states that Prentis is the only translator working on the numerous foreign language versions of his material that he trusts totally.

How long until he felt at home linguistically? "A year," Simon recalls. "But it was two years before I felt really comfortable." He supported himself during that time as an English teacher for adolescents who did not want to learn. "So they didn't," he states, "and I learned Japanese." After moving to Tokyo, Prentis joined a translation company, and learned to read and write Japanese, which took another three years.

How long till he felt at home psychologically in Japan? "Seven years!" he exclaims. "One day I was walking down the street, and I had one of those moments that you sometimes do when you realize something. I thought, this isn't a foreign country any more. But that has to be prefaced with the fact that I never really felt at home in my own country."

An English major at Oxford, Prentis hated the stuffiness of academia and found that his literary taste veered towards the satire of Jonathan Swift, with whom he feels Zappa has much in common. "I think Frank compares very closely with Swift. In 'Tale of a Tub,' Swift uses the tub as his metaphor for a preacher's pulpit. He was doing satire in 18th Century England the way Frank does his stuff on all those TV evangelists."

A classical music devotee, Prentis became interested in rock and roll only after hearing Zappa. During his years in Japan, his enthusiasm for his music never diminished. "I'm a fan," he states. "I don't think there's anybody who compares with Frank in his span across the range of expression that is available in the late 20th Century. When I went to Japan, I suffered Zappa withdrawal symptoms. I only had *Sleep Dirt* with me, the last thing I bought before I got on the plane, and it was the only thing I had for about a year." Digging through the bootleg counter at a department store, Prentis found half a dozen Zappa albums he'd been trying to find for ten years. Surprised to see liner notes in Japanese, he tracked down the author, and the two became friends.

"His name was Yasuo Yagi," Prentis states, "and he used to do the artwork and packaging. In 1982, I was going to the United States, and we

agreed that I should interview Frank, which he arranged. I was so nervous. I don't remember anything about it. We talked for about an hour. The interview appeared on a Japanese record sleeve, and the guy who runs the record company told me it was the first interview he'd read with Frank that blew him away."

In '86, Simon returned to the West. "I had done nearly eight years in Japan as an adult, and I knew how Japan worked more than I did about my own country," he explains. "So I decided I really ought to go back and find out about England." He stopped once again in the United States to interview Frank, the result again published in Japan. A call from Gail Zappa asking for a translated copy led to more contact.

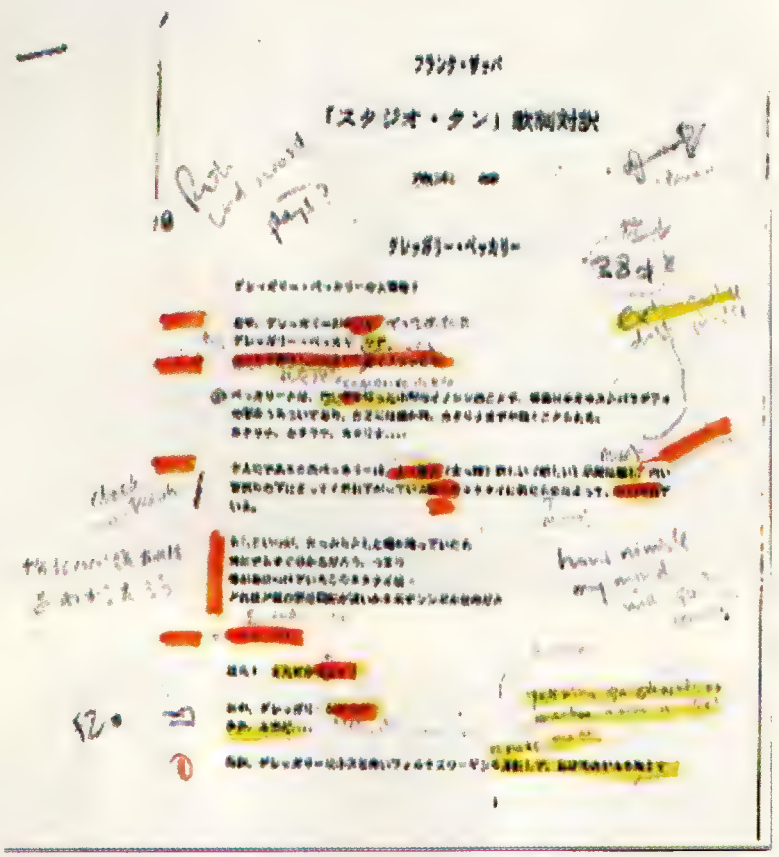
Today, Prentis's most rewarding moments are in overseeing the translation of Zappa's lyrics into Japanese. The re-release of the entire catalog began six years ago, in a land where cover bands mimic every Zappa dialect parody with eerie accuracy regardless of their lack of fluency in English. His translations of lyrics are in a language where there is no concept of rhyme, in an alphabet that is pictographic and not phonetic, and are distributed to a society where the television news once played "Sinister Footwear" as backup music to a story of a maniac who laced chocolates with poison.

Gail and Frank asked Simon to take over after they found out that a lot of the earlier translations were wrong. "You think you know what Frank's lyrics mean," he states, "but when it comes down to putting them into another language, you really have to think, especially with Japanese, which is about as weird as you can get. I use one guy who does the rough translations, and he can get 90% of it right. It's the 10% that he doesn't get that is the critical area of nuance — the stuff that makes Frank's lyrics interesting.

"In translating, you really only have two options: To find a cultural equivalent or a linguistic one. If an aural pun exists, like 'horse' and 'whores,' you have to come up with something that feels the same, that's going to make people laugh in the same way, and then you just footnote it. It's surprising what you can do if you put your mind to it. It's more important to get across what it means."

When uncertain, Prentis doesn't guess. "If you don't know what it means yourself," he continues, "how do you put that into Japanese? So I fax Frank and ask him, and he's been sending back these little definitions and explanations."

Asked for examples of recent linguistic chuckholes, Prentis points to the line from *Joe's Garage*: "the white zone is for loading and unloading" (referring just to an airport, to something with deeper philosophical overtones, or both?); from "Penguin in Bondage": "She come up to you on the strut" ("walking with a swagger" or "riding a strut assembled across the bed"?); from "Bebop Tango": "Okay, just relax, put your head back, here comes the drill" ("calm down before the test" or "put your head back, here comes the dentist's drill"?).



"YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHAT FRANK'S LYRICS MEAN, BUT WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO PUTTING THEM INTO ANOTHER LANGUAGE, YOU REALLY HAVE TO THINK, ESPECIALLY WITH JAPANESE."

Sometimes literal translation is impossible. For "... they lived by a code which is probably SMPTE," on "Baby Snakes," an equivalent with the same linguistic effect had to be created using another word altogether that still had a dual meaning that would produce a similar effect. Footnotes explain that such alterations have been made.

"Until you think about it," Prentis states, "it doesn't really seem to matter, but it *does* matter. Just having to work on the translation means that you've got to fine-tune. There's an image that Frank uses about the 'project object' — any particular work. Imagine the head of a pin engraved in some incredible little detail, and imagine whole continental areas covered with heads of pins; that's what the deal is. It's those little details about his work that I like that maybe nobody's ever going to find out, but that are there. On one fadeout, he's got someone singing in falsetto in Japanese, "Don't worry about it." Now who is going to know that? The way the intonation is, probably no Japanese would recognize it, but it's in there. This is the kind of thing I like about his work. It's like fractal geometry — another world suddenly opens up that you didn't know was there. And it's the details like that that are great, so it would be good just to say that Frank Zappa cares enough about his music to have authenticated Japanese translations with footnotes, and that he and Gail put the Barking Pumpkin stamp of approval on it. They even gave me a plaque: 'Simon Prentis, Semantic Scrutinizer.'" **Z**

MARQUESON AT MIX POSITION IN ACT I

MARQUE COY

Patron Saint At Joe's Garage

"RESERVED FOR DAISY Duck's Receptionist," the parking sign says, but it's really for the "God of Monitoring," Marque Coy, a.k.a. "Marqueson." Zappa's longest-tenured employee, Coy has been at the monitor board for Zappa's stage shows since 1981 and otherwise sitting in the head office of the premier rehearsal facility in the Los Angeles area — Joe's Garage. He named it, too.

It was in the middle of the '88 tour that Gail Zappa decided to open such a place. To run it, Frank suggested Marqueson; to house it, the ugly warehouse where for 15 years they had stored his equipment, Zappa rehearsed his bands, and finally, where Barfko-Swill was born.rehearsed his bands. With metal beams and bare concrete, it wasn't the most glamorous joint on Earth. Even now, renovated, it looks no better (or worse) from the outside than the other enterprises in an industrial section of the San Fernando Valley, protected by a floppy chain-link fence and surrounded by the likes of carburetor repair specialists and vacant lots.

"The Zappas didn't know what they were going to call it," Coy recounts. "I said, 'Well, you *own* the name.' They said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'The line in the song goes: "You can jam at Joe's Garage. . . ." Let's call it "Joe's Garage."' And we did."

So why is Coy called *Marqueson*? "There was one guy in the band named Mark Man, so they nicknamed me Marque*son*," Coy explains. "I actually enjoy that, because if anybody who knows me wants my attention, they'll call me Marqueson, since I've been on several crews where there've been lots of Marks."

And where's he from, and what's his background? Colorado and music. Born in Denver, raised in Brighton, played piano at seven, became a state-certified music teacher at 13, was further educated in Grand Junction, and ended up — as vice president of student services — booking entertainment in college, of most future significance a band called Helix (which contained several future Zappa folks, including George Douglas). "My sense of meter is about the only carryover musical skill that matters in working with Frank," Marqueson says. "I have a good sense of *now*."

Coy had always been fascinated with sound. "I went to my guidance counsellor for help," Marqueson recalls. "I told him, 'I know there's some guy that assembles all the music on these records; there's one guy that sits there and puts it all together and makes the collage work. That's what I want to do.' He said, 'Take computer science.' I took two-and-a-half years and never got my hands on a computer. The guy was clueless. I said, 'Phooey on this,' and switched to pre-law, except I ran out of money for law school. On a fluke, I asked Helix if they needed a roadie. They did — me. Good-bye."

Helix got signed and renamed Boulder. They settled in Los Angeles, made enough money to live on but not to be heard of, and eventually turned into Warren Zevon's backup band. Coy went to Elektra Asylum as a staff engineer from 1978-1980, then off to tour with Chris De Burgh (where he worked with Harry Andronis), then back to Elektra, and then the phone rang.

"I pick it up," he recalls. "A voice says, 'I understand you're a monitor engineer.' 'Well, I'm a recording engineer,' I said, 'but I know how to do monitors.' The guy says, 'Well, my production manager will call you within the hour — you're hired.' I said, 'Who *is* this?' He said, 'Frank Zappa.' I said, 'Oh . . . okay. . . .' I've been with him ever since."

WHEN RELIGIOUS GROUPS VISIT THE GARAGE, THE "TITTIES & BEER" T-SHIRT PILLOWS GET TURNED AROUND.

According to Coy, life on the road with Zappa is always difficult and always enjoyable. The hard parts involve things like close

encounters with electricity and flying concrete. Some are no big deal, just embarrassing. Like in one show, when a bad power outlet caused all of the stage monitors to go out — but, shucks, the show was about to end anyway.

More frightening was an unbooked thundershower in Mannheim, Germany, which roared in and dumped a quarter-inch of water in the bottom of Marqueson's console before the crew could throw plastic covering over the equipment. "The rain had not gotten up to the edge of the ribbon connectors," Coy recalls, "so I took all the modules out, got a hair dryer and a pencil eraser, cleaned all the tips, and mopped the water out with towels."

He reprieved himself from electrocution once, too. "It was on the first tour," he says with a grin. "I was disconnecting the recording truck snakes and happened to have my arm around a lighting truss, and all of a sudden I got a real good jolt. I was stuck between the recording truck and the lighting system. I finally made myself relax, and I was able to pull free. I never did like to do anything with power. I let the electricians do that now."

Riots in Europe seemed to be in vogue during the early 1980s. Coy survived minor scuffles and trash throwing in Kiel, Geneva, and Barcelona. However, a more major assault occurred in Palermo, on the last show of the '82 tour. "The kids starting fighting with the police," he recalls. "The bleachers were getting torn apart, and huge bonfires were being set. For a while we kept playing, but we couldn't sing, because tear gas started floating all about. Finally, when chunks of concrete started flying, we just cleared out." The cover of *The Man from Utopia* gives you the idea.

ACT I, USED FOR TOUR REHEARSALS AND SHOWCASES, IS EQUIPPED WITH BOTH A MEYERS P.A. AND A LARGE MONITOR SYSTEM. ITS SIZE ACCOMMODATES AN AUDIENCE IF SO REQUIRED BY THE BAND OR A RECORD COMPANY.

THE VIEW IN ACT II. THIS ROOM IS OFTEN USED TO RECORD PRE-PRODUCTION WORK OR SMALLER GROUP REHEARSALS SINCE THE EQUIPMENT IS A MONITOR SYSTEM ONLY. THE CLOTH PAINTING OF THE CAR ONCE RESIDED IN THE ZAPPA HOUSE AND WAS A GIFT FROM FANS.

Good memories predominate. "Every time I've gone anywhere with Frank, it's been a yuck a minute, a chuckle a minute," Marqueson smiles. "There's always something new to laugh about. Some of the situations occur right in front of you, and some of them he'll have seen in a newspaper, and *that* becomes the joke, and off it runs, and then it expands, and away it goes, and you're just sitting there laughing."

What happens when everyone gets to the venue? "I have a little talk with the musicians," Marqueson explains. "I tell them they can have anything they want, unless it starts to become a problem with the others surrounding them. Ultimately, if something annoys Frank, Frank's the boss. He's hard to work with, but he gives you the tools. He asks an awful lot, but he makes it easy, so you can accomplish what he wants. He's great. Very articulate, tells you what he wants, and you provide it, or there'll be someone else there who can and will. But we do have little struggles sometimes between the musicians. One tour, the house engineer did nothing but complain about the saxophone. No wonder. Out at the mix position, which is more than 100 feet away from the stage, it registered 110 db just from the monitors alone!"

After these little chats, Coy gets serious about sound. "You start nailing things down," he states. "I've got something wrong in this specific area or with these specific frequencies out of this wedge. You find your weak points, and once the show starts, when you're starting to have a problem, you go straight to those areas, instead of standing there guessing what it could be. You

IN ACT III, THE YAMAHA BOARD SHOWN HERE WAS RECENTLY UPDATED TO A 48-TRACK HARRISON MIXING CONSOLE ON WHICH NUMEROUS ZAPPA ALBUMS WERE MIXED.

should already know. All the time, I'm punching up different things, constantly listening to all mixes, all mics. You go through your inputs quickly, and if you start hearing something, it's just a matter of knowing what to do with any noise and how to get rid of the extraneous stuff."

Rattling off tour equipment is not especially revealing. Zappa had his own specific wedges, which Marqueson retuned in '88, because he wanted to get some better low end out of them for Frank. Everybody else had Tycobrahe cabinets. As to microphones — the first input and therefore the most important thing happening — every application had its own, and every application could change. Zappa always brings piles of mikes for performances: ElectroVoice, AKG, Shure 57s, Neumann, take your pick.

On the '88 *Broadway the Hard Way* tour, for monitors Marqueson used a Soundcraft board with 40 inputs and 16 mixes, but a lot of those were double from something like 32 cabinets. The crew was a production manager, numerous roadies, and three sound people: Coy on monitor, Harry Andronis as house engineer, and Bob Stone as engineer in the recording truck. (In years before, Stone had worked in the house.)

"In '88, we all got all the audio-signal information at the same time — from the truck," Marqueson states. "I lived on a splitter, custom-made for Frank. All the mics came into it. No one was making one like that thing. It was 118 inputs by three. I think there were only 97 [signals] available to all three, but 118 went to the truck. The house got one feed, the record truck got another, and I got the third."

During performance, communication from Frank with his musicians was, predictably, by hand signals. Nothing special. He telegraphed key changes by making letters with his fingers. He raised and lowered his hand to indicate changes in amplitude. Screwing the head in a sort of a dreadlock gesture meant do reggae or ska.

There's no better time to job-hunt than when you have a good job. During lulls following the end of tours, Marqueson worked with other groups. "Nine times out of ten, they're so critical about résumés and checking out sources," he says. "With me, when I would tell them how long I'd worked with Frank Zappa, there were no more questions, and I would double my money."

Those freelance jobs (though not the offers) pretty much ended when the doors of Joe's Garage opened in February 1989. Marqueson and Dave Dondorf built the sound systems and Gail designed the facility. Three main rooms: Act I, Act II, and Act III. All double doors. Act III houses a 24-track studio tie-lined, with audio *and* video, to the main rehearsal rooms (Act I the larger, and Act II the smaller) for monitoring, mixing, and feasibly to even record a live album. Stages were put in Act I and Act II. "A lot of places just have level floors, but to me that's where garage bands rehearse," Coy states. "There's a different attitude when a person steps on a stage. You get on that thing, and it's time to go to work. Anyway, I went after a very specific client — the higher end."

He got them, too, at $30-$50 per hour, $300-$500 per day for lockouts: Yazawa, Rod Stewart, Ozzy Osbourne, Carole King, Air Supply, Jefferson Airplane, Stray Cats, Tom Petty, not to mention countless acts needing to showcase their performance in front of record executives. That's why the video cameras were installed — for bands to see how they appeared, to give them a chance to correct their look, to present an image for mom and dad to watch on the TV in the entryway (so they wouldn't have to listen in the performance rooms at the high volumes the record execs endured). Asphalt Ballet and Wild Side, among others, have been signed as a result of their showcases at Joe's Garage.

And what's the schedule? "I'm in at 10 A.M., and I'm here till midnight," Marqueson states. "I'm first in, last out. And we have simple rules. If I think people have problems with drugs or behavior, I'm not available for their business. There's rarely a problem, though. Musicians love Frank. All of them who come in here are all in awe just looking around at everything."

There's a lot that's fun to look at. A huge wall with autographs and graffiti. Road mementos, such as the "Daisy Duck" sign, that serve as decorations revealing the Zappa love of the bizarre and humorous: a sign in German that translates "Driving in the wrong direction is forbidden"; an autographed photo of Sammy Davis, Jr.; pillows cased by tour T-shirts; an Osmond Brothers poster; an old "Phi Krappa Zappa" poster viewable from the toilet.

OUTSIDE
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Marqueson seems genuinely unclear about what Frank likes about his work. The only thing he can figure is that "I've got good ears, lots of patience, confidence. I'm diligent and will work 'til the job's done, and I do what I'm supposed to do correctly. I love what I know. I just try to stay on top of things, and really listen. Murphy lives and rules with an iron fist, and you never know when he's going to come and visit you." **Z**

HARRY AT THE CONSOLE

Harry Andronis

MixMaster Outside The Kitchen

"HE SAYS, 'ANYONE WHO has a coat like that must know something,' and he hired me," laughs Harry Andronis, house mixer for Frank Zappa since the 1988 *Broadway the Hard Way* tour. Was that coat of many colors? Lined with French postcards? Why special enough to warrant on-the-spot hiring? "Who knows?" Andronis muses. "It's really nothing. Just one of those heavy, East Coast overcoats."

As with many Zappa hirings, that glib comment was in fact the end, not the flip beginning, of a screening process that had already been completed after a strong recommendation to Frank by one of his most trusted workers — Marque Coy, then in charge of monitor mixes and now manager of Joe's Garage [*see page 88*].

Coy and Andronis had worked together in the '70s for Chris De Burgh, a superstar in Europe (if barely an opening act in the U.S.). In 1987, while Andronis was working on a Shadowfax LP down the street from where Zappa was rehearsing, he convinced his old road buddy to sneak him in to watch. Emboldened on discovering that no house mixer had yet been hired, Harry told Coy to throw his name into the hat.

A longtime Zappa fan, Harry was first introduced to his music at age 13 by a cousin who sat him down with *Hot Rats*. "I thought it was brilliant," he recalls. "I was always moved by what was happening in the tracks sonically and musically — just the sound of different instruments, and he used weird ones — bass clarinets and xylophones. It was almost like Spike Jones, only it wasn't hysterical."

A 10-week course offered by the RIAA taught Andronis the rudiments of recording. An apprenticeship during college at the Paragon Recording Studio filled in gaps of his audio education. Besides learning to clean out garbage cans, he learned how to copy tapes, set up sessions, and second in the control booth. Finally, he was doing jingles for Schlitz, McDonald's, and United Airlines, as well as night-time stints with rhythm and blues groups and local celebrities such as Stix.

"Eventually," he states, "I got too big for my britches and too burned out, and I split for Los Angeles." A fluke led to a position with Supertramp just as their *Breakfast in America* soared up the charts, dragging the support staff up and away on tour, and leaving Andronis to

hold down the board in their demo studio, where he worked with such luminaries as Jean-Luc Ponty and Earl Slick. In 1982 he moved on to Shadowfax, with whom he still works occasionally. "I learned a lot with Shadowfax that applies now to Zappa," he says, "especially early on, because they used a lot of exotic percussion. We also played a lot of places that didn't have adequate P.A.s, and I had to learn to use the room. If you don't have the right reverb, you listen to the room and say, 'Okay, well, it's got a bit of ring to it, so there it is.'"

This minimalist/improvisational approach is the key to his work now with Zappa, though initially, because of it, he feared his first gig would be his last. "I think I worried Frank at the rehearsals," he explains. "The first day, he came up and was talking to me, and I could see him looking at the back of the console. Finally, he said, 'Is everything plugged in?' I walked around the back and looked and said, 'Yeah, looks like it. Why?' 'There's a lot of holes here.' I looked at the stage and told Frank, 'It's a 10-piece band, and it's pretty busy anyway. Everybody's got a lot of processing on their stuff now, don't they?' And he went, 'Yep.' And I said, 'Most of the halls we're playing are going to have at least 1.5 seconds of reverb time, aren't they?' And he said, 'Yeah.' 'Most of the places are going to have 200-300 milliseconds slapping off a wall somewhere, aren't they?' He said, 'Yeah.' And I said, 'Well, I don't think I need anything, do I?' And he said, 'Well, maybe not.'

"You see, I had decided I wasn't going to use a lot of effects. Since 1973 I'd seen at least one show from every one of Frank's tours. I was never terribly impressed by the sound. I felt it was almost insulting, even painful at times. They used to tear apart the house studio and bring it on the road. So in the front, they'd have chambers, delays, compressors, auto pans, gates, Aphexes, and all that sort of *stuff* — and it sounded that way. Plus, there seemed to have been high-end deprivation, because they used to bring these extra piezo packs and throw them on top of the stacks for extra high end. So the first thing I did was get rid of all those effects."

Andronis actually had brought an old Scamp effects rack, an FPX, and an AMS delay for Zappa's comfort, but he ended up using only a little reverb for a couple of outdoor shows. "Otherwise," he recalls, "with ten guys playing these arrangements which had 128th-notes flying and bouncing all over the place, the last thing they needed in a hall was some added reverb and delay. I'm out there to make Frank Zappa sound good — whatever it takes, and I think the people that went to see those '88 shows got to see the finest performances they'll ever see.

THE FIRST SOUNDCHECK THAT WE DID, FRANK WALKED IN AND TURNED ON HIS GUITAR AND IT WAS JUST BLAZING, AND I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE P.A. UP, SO I IMMEDIATELY GOT ON THE TALKBACK AND SAID, "FRANK, YOU'VE GOT TO TURN IT DOWN." MY INTERCOM STARTED FLASHING, AND A COUPLE OF THE GUYS WERE SAYING, "WHAT DID YOU SAY TO FRANK? IT'S HIS SHOW." ALL I COULD SAY WAS, "LOOK, HE'S PAYING ME TO MAKE HIM SOUND GOOD." FRANK WALKED OVER, TURNED DOWN, AND WALKED BACK TO THE MIKE AND SAID, "IS THAT OKAY?" FROM THAT DAY ON, HE WOULD ASK IF IT WAS TOO LOUD OR NOT.

"I'm very happily employed. People are sometimes intimidated by Frank, because he looks you straight in the eye, but he's amiable and fun. I've always had a good time, if for no other reason than to be able to get my hands on this kind of music. And the humor factor is great. When [evangelist Jimmy] Swaggart got busted, there was high morale for a couple of weeks. That's always what makes you want to work hard, because you just know that something special might just happen any night. Not to mention, having the acknowledgment of someone like Frank Zappa that I know what I'm doing certainly helps my own self-esteem.

"It's his music, he's paying you to do the gig, do it. I ran up against that real early, because the first soundcheck that we did, Frank walked in and turned on his guitar and it was just blazing, and I didn't even have the P.A. up, so I immediately got on the talkback and said, 'Frank, you've got to turn it down,' and my intercom started flashing, and a couple of the guys from the crew who'd been with him for a while were saying, 'What did you say to Frank?' 'I told him to turn down, it's pretty loud, isn't it?' And they said, 'Yeah, but it's his show,' and all I could say was, 'Look, he's paying me to make him sound good, and right now he's really loud, and it's making it really difficult for me to make anything else happen.' Anyway, Frank walked over, and turned down, and walked back to the mike and said, 'Is that okay?' and from that day on, he would come in and play the guitar and ask if it was too loud or not.

"When it comes to the gig, if you have something to talk about he'll talk to you all day, but if you don't, then just get on with it. The guy hires you to do the gig, and he expects you to do it, and once he knows that you can do it, he leaves you alone. He's absolutely wonderful. He's going for a certain thing, and he knows how to get it, and when you're working with him, he can not only tell you what he wants, but he can also tell you *how* to get it. What more do you want than to be left to do your gig? The people that stay are consummate professionals — they know the gig."

Since the end of the '88 tour, Andronis has continued to help Zappa remix old material (by the end of the tour, the set list totalled nearly 130 tunes). He also has established himself in the world of television, doing Foley work and dialog recording for such shows as *Batman, Tiny Toons, Tasmania, L.A. Law, Doogie Howser,* and *Ren and Stimpy.*

Andronis looks forward especially to the upcoming Zappa events in Germany. Advance preparation will be handled by the Ensemble Modern, which will send him diagrams, basic room dimensions, and probable location of PA stacks. "Because it is six-channel surround sound," he says, "we're going to have to put double stacks on the sides [of the auditorium] in the middle, and the board will have to be stuck in the middle of the audience. The Ensemble's tech has played in these halls, so I'm depending a lot on him. The surround sound is what's going to be the trick. We may feed the sound to the truck first, because I'm still not sure how many inputs we're going to end up with. The biggest problem is going to be that these musicians are going to be spread around the stage in unorthodox manners, and we're going to be mixing in six-channel surround. We'll go over a couple of weeks early and work in a rehearsal hall with the system, since we can't get into the actual halls until the night of the show. They'll also need to monitor the taped Synclavier material because they're going to be playing with it at times, so we can expect some monitoring problems on stage that will interfere with the miking — there's a lot of stuff we haven't worked out yet.

"I think these shows will be of severe historical importance," he concludes. "It's Frank Zappa. The man is one of the more unique composers around, and is one of the few who actually has the balls to try to execute something like this. I know he would probably kill me for saying this, but to me it's really like going to see Stravinsky conduct his orchestra — on that level. It's Frank Zappa doing something that no one else would do. The guy truly is the vanguard." **Z**

Van Carlson

Emmy-Winning Electronic Cinematographer

"I STILL REGRET IT," VAN Carlson shakes his head. "He wanted me to go with him to the Senate hearings in Washington on the PMRC issue, and I just couldn't get it together in one day to pack and get on that plane."

Oh, well; Zappa's shelves are now crammed with video footage shot over the last seven years by Carlson: Frank's experiments with the Synclavier when he test-drove it for the first time, the *Peefeeyatco* documentary for German television, *The Dub Room Special* with Dweezil and Moon, a *Basement Tape* show with Martha Quinn for MTV, the historic visit of the Ensemble Modern, in July 1991, the trips Frank took to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the *Two on the Town* special for CBS that first brought Carlson in contact with Zappa.

Van was the one who suggested that interview occur. He was a Zappa fan. The five days spent in Frank's domain ended up as an eight-minute clip (out of 20 hours shot) on the program, but Zappa remembered Carlson's unorthodox handling of the camera, so he ropes him into his camp whenever he wants something captured on video. "He says I have an eye for things, and I do have a certain point of view," Van says. "You have to be able to anticipate what may happen. If you can anticipate where the action might go, then you may be prepared to do something interesting with what's happening."

That sounds more clinical than Frank does. "The guy's brilliant," Zappa states. "When I was with [former Czech President Vaclav] Havel, 50 camera guys were shooting us face on, and I look over, and there's Van *behind* us, shooting our image reflected on a polished metal urn." Unorthodox, creative — just what Zappa likes.

"Television is really the lowest and basest medium everywhere," Carlson states, "and I don't consider it a possibility — certainly the way things are going in this country — that this material I shoot of Frank will ever really have a place to be aired." The Emmy Award winner spends most of his time doing pilots that end up nowhere anyway, viewed by major network executives — and them alone. His Zappa material has aired in edited form on *Good Morning America*, MTV, FNN, CBS, and in Honker Home Video releases.

The labor involved can be exhausting. "It's always difficult to work with Frank," Carlson explains, "because he's always working. It's so physically demanding. There are just so many hours in a day that I can carry a camera around, and he'll want me to carry it as long as I can. In Russia, I was completely exhausted."

The trip to the Soviet bloc was a high point in Carlson's relationship with Frank. "It's what I imagine it was like to have been in New York when the Beatles arrived," Van recalls. "In Czechoslovakia, as the airplane was pulling in to the gate, you could hear voices growing louder and louder shouting 'Zappa, Zappa!' And we looked out the window, and there were huge crowds of people holding up signs saying 'Welcome Frank.' Even the baggage handlers were standing on top of the airport waving. From the moment we stepped out of that plane, for the next four or five days, it was just nonstop fans."

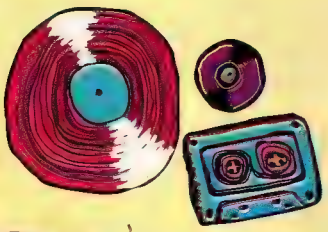
Only Carlson and Dave Dondorf accompanied Zappa on that trip, and they both worried for Frank's well-being, since he was swept away by the crowds. As a guest of a member of the government, eventually Zappa was afforded some rudimentary security. Carlson believes this overwhelming reception was a result of two facts: Zappa's music has always been very popular in Europe, and Czechoslovakia — in particular — is recognized as the intellectual center of Eastern Europe, a sophisticated enough nation to have actually elected the celebrated playwright and intellectual Vaclav Havel as president. And, yes, they met him.

"Havel was very nervous about meeting Frank, because he was a fan," Van states. "I overheard him saying to Frank, 'Oh, you know, my most favorite record was *Bongo Fury* with Captain Beefheart.' It was one of those moments of 'Pinch me — what am I doing here!'"

The stop in Moscow had its share of odd encounters as well. Carlson had visited there years before and expected the same strict monitoring of activity that characterized pre-perestroika Russia. "We were staying at a nasty hotel by the Kremlin," he recalls, "and St. Basil's was all lit up in the snow. So without any permission, we just stopped to get a shot of it at like two in the morning. It would have been impossible to do that in Washington, D.C. — to just drive, in a private car, up to the steps of the White House without having a security check. But there we were in Red Square, already rolling before a guard came over. Our driver said, 'Zappa.' The guard said, 'Fine.'"

Editing the raw material is done jointly with Frank, who brings the same intensity and attention to detail that he brings to CD mastering. "You look at a bar of his music, and that's how much he can cram into a video of the same duration," Carlson begins. "He's very critical, and that's one of the problems, because he takes a lot of time to do these things. Some of his music reproduces the human voice so there's all this imprecision and no evenly ordered tempo, as with the voice. He can do the same thing visually. Colors have to match. Or he'll catch a certain gesture that may not be central to the image, but it's a gesture nonetheless. He'll use it like a tonal change in making an edit from one image to another. He'll use that gesture as a theme, as a way to carry forward to the next frame. And they're *not* obvious, unless you're paying attention.

"It's been fun," Van concludes. "I was awestruck to be able to come to his home that first time, and I'm always surprised when he calls. I still have to pinch myself. Working with Frank Zappa is about the only time when my professional ambitions and my personal considerations completely join. These are always treasured moments." **Z**



ON VINYL, TAPE, & CD

THE FIRST AUTHORIZED COMPLETE ZAPPA AUDIO-VISUAL CATALOG

THE "PROJECT/OBJECT"

Who better to speak than Frank himself on the meaning of his artistic life, partially reflected in the authorized albums he's produced over the last 25 years:

"Imagine the head of a pin. On the head of this pin is an amazingly detailed illustration of some sort. It might be a little thought or a feeling or perhaps an obscure symbol. It might just be a picture of a sky or something with birds in it . . . but it's on the head of this pin, remember, and it's infinitely detailed. Now, imagine this pin is not a pin. It's a musical note with a corresponding physical action, like the secret raising of an eyebrow to add special emphasis. Even in a recording studio where nobody can see you do it.

COVER ART FOR FZ'S CD RELEASE CIVILIZATION: PHAZE III BY URI BALASHOV, © '92 BARKING PUMPKIN RECORDS

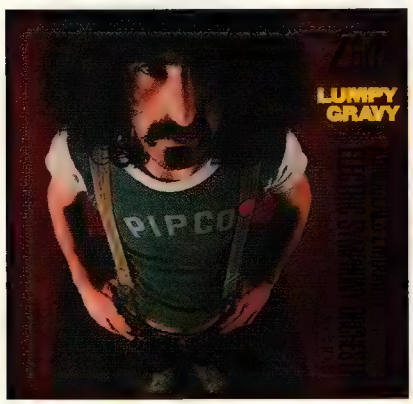
"Now, imagine enough of these abstracted pins (with the needle part chopped off to save space) to fill an area as large as the North American Continent and most of Central Europe, piled to a depth of 80 feet. Now, imagine this area is not geometric space. Imagine a collection of decades (the exact number to be disclosed eventually). Pause. . . . The basic blueprints were executed in 1962-63. Preliminary experimentation in early and mid-1964. Construction of the *project/object* began in late 1964. Work is still in progress.

"What we sound like is more than what we sound like. We are part of the *project/object.* The *project/object* (maybe you like *event/organism* better) incorporates any available visual medium, consciousness of all participants (including audience), all perceptual deficiencies, God (as energy), The Big Note (as universal basic building material), and other things. We make a special art in an environment hostile to dreamers."*Excerpted from the 200 Motels press kit, circa 1971. Complete test is reprinted in the Scrapbook, available in Vol. 2 of the "Beat the Boots!" collection on FOO-EEE/Rhino.*

1. Freak Out!

2. Absolutely Free

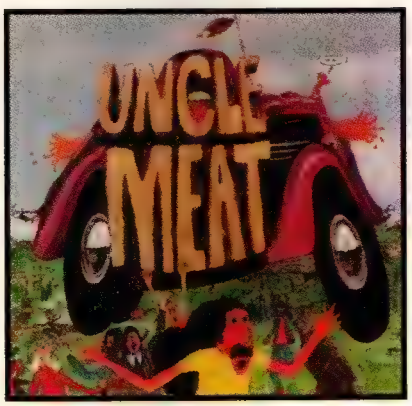
3. We're Only In It For The Money



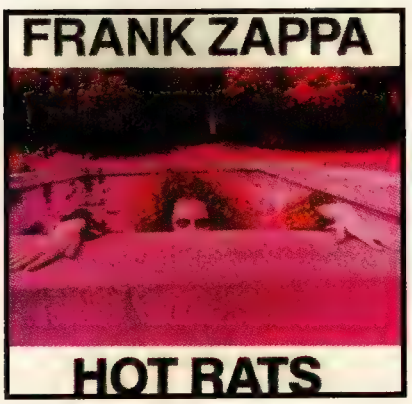
4. Lumpy Gravy

5. Cruisin' With Ruben & The Jets

6. Mothermania



7. Uncle Meat



8. Hot Rats

9. Burnt Weeny Sandwich

10. Weasels Ripped My Flesh

11. Chunga's Revenge

12. Fillmore East, June 1971

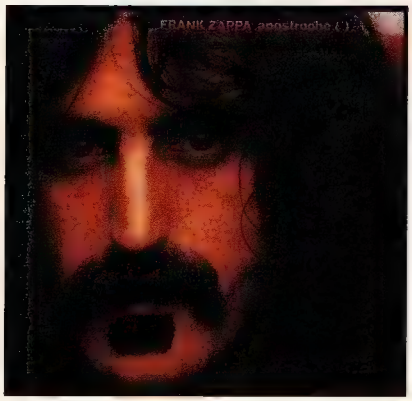
Mothermania + 200 Motels Cover Art Courtesy of: Society Pages

13. 200 Motels

17. Over-Nite Sensation

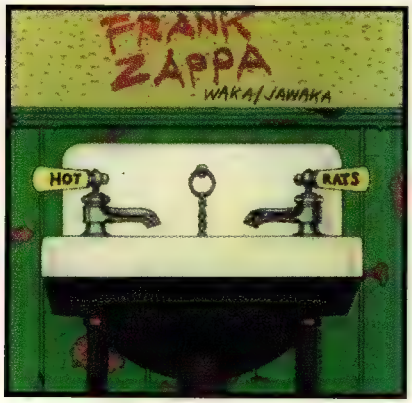
21. Bongo Fury

14. Just Another Band From L.A.

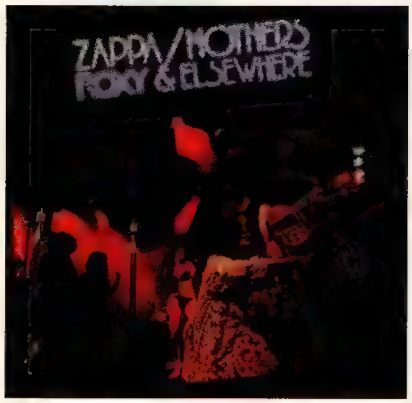


18. Apostrophe (')

22. Zoot Allures

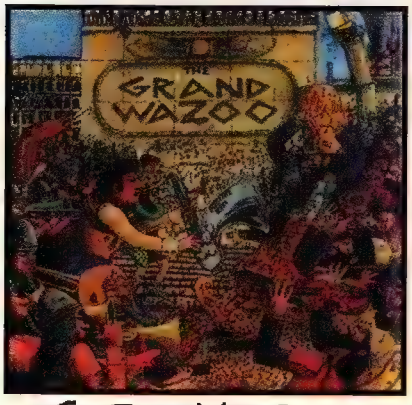


15. Waka/Jawaka



19. Roxy & Elsewhere

23. Zappa in New York



16. The Grand Wazoo

20. One Size Fits All

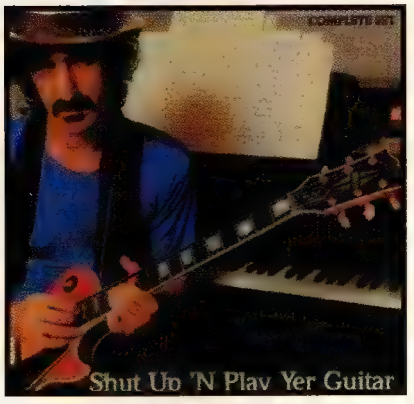
24. Studio Tan

25. SLEEP DIRT

30. TINSELTOWN REBELLION

35. SHIP ARRIVING TOO LATE TO SAVE A DROWNING WITCH

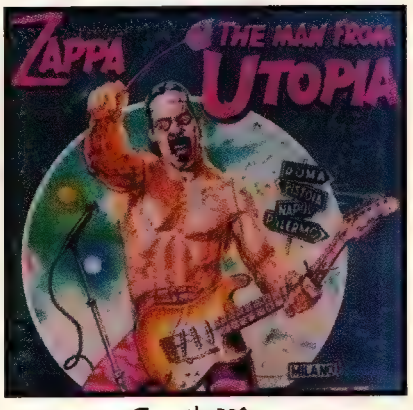
26. SHEIK YERBOUTI



31. SHUT UP 'N PLAY YER GUITAR

32. SHUT UP 'N PLAY YER GUITAR SOME MORE

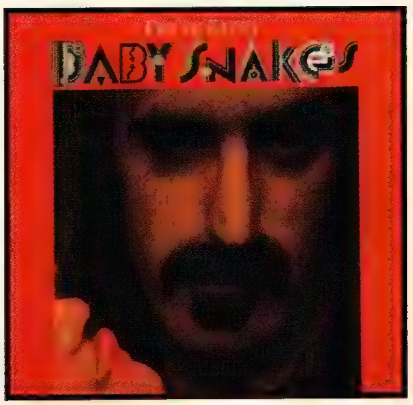
33. RETURN OF THE SON OF SHUT UP 'N PLAY YER GUITAR



36. THE MAN FROM UTOPIA

27. ORCHESTRAL FAVORITES

34. YOU ARE WHAT YOU IS



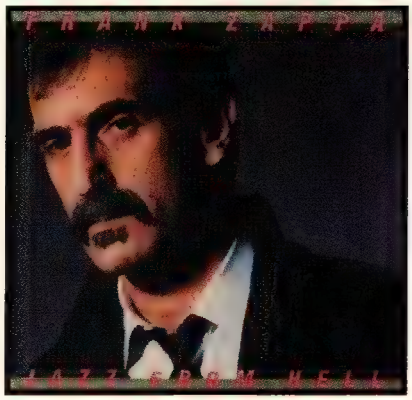
37. BABY SNAKES

28+A. JOE'S GARAGE ACTS I, II, & III

38. LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA VOL. I

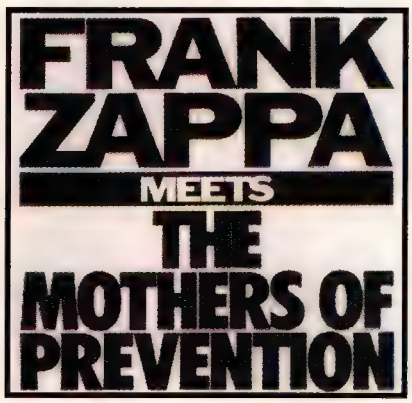
39. Boulez Conducts Zappa, The Perfect Stranger

43. The Old Masters, Box 1

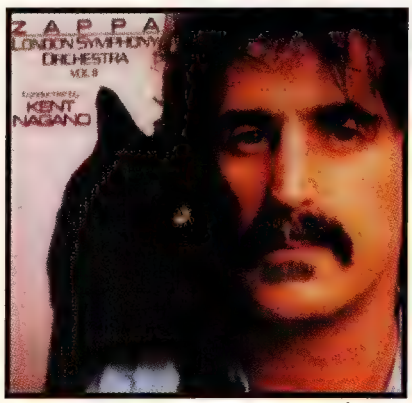


47. Jazz From Hell

40. Them Or Us

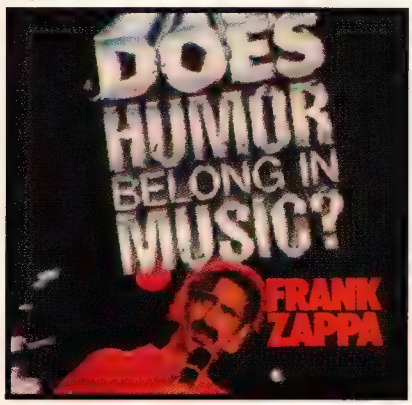


44. FZ Meets The Mothers of Prevention



48. London Symphony Orchestra Vol. 2

41. Thing Fish

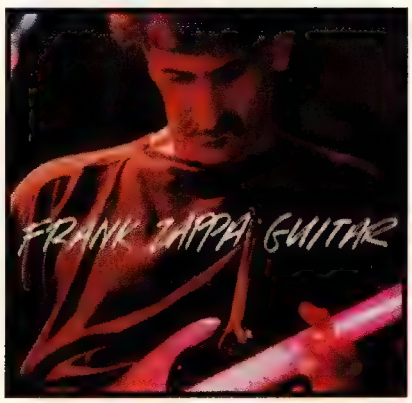


45. Does Humor Belong in Music?

49. The Old Masters, Box 3

42. Francesco Zappa

46. The Old Masters, Box 2



50. Guitar

51. You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol.1

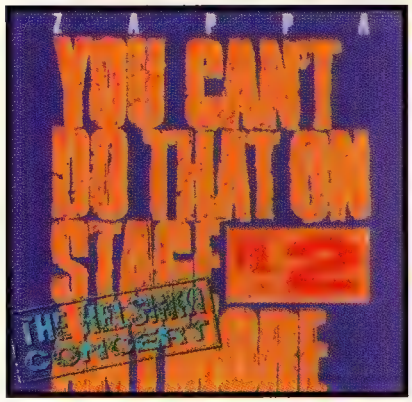
55. The Best Band You Never Heard In Your Life

58. You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol.6

52. Broadway The Hardway

56. Make A Jazz Noise Here

60. Playground Psychotics



53. You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol.2

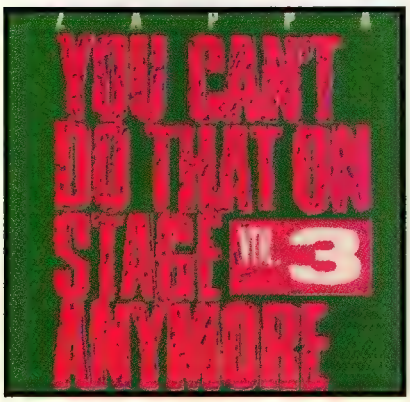
57. You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol.4

BEAT THE BOOTS!

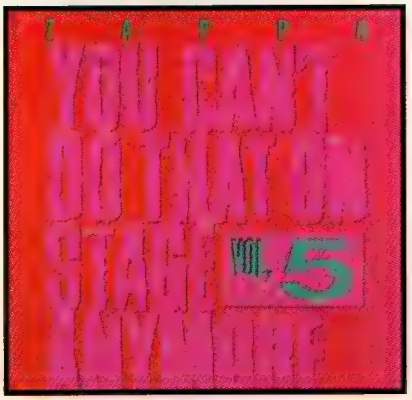
These boxed sets were released by FOO-EEE Records, distributed by Rhino, in order to make infamous hard-to-find Zappa bootlegs more accessable.

Beat the Boots no.1. *As An Am; The Ark; Freaks & Motherf*%!!@#; Unmitigated Audacity; Anyway The Wind Blows; 'Tis The Season to Be Jelly; Sarbrucken 1978.*

Beat The Boots no. 2. *Disconnected Synapses; Tengo Na Minchia Tanta; Electric Aunt Jemima; At The Circus; Swiss Cheese/Fire!; Our Man In Nirvana; Conceptual Continuity.* **Z**



54. You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol.3



59. You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol.5

THE OLD MASTERS

(Shown on previous pages) contain the following remastered titles:

Box One. *Freak Out!; Absolutely Free; We're Only In it for the Money; Lumpy Gravy; Cruising with Ruben and the Jets; Mystery Disc.*

Box Two. *Uncle Meat; Hot Rats; Burnt Weeny Sandwich; Weasels Ripped My Flesh; Chunga's Revenge; Fillmore East; Just Another Band From L.A.; Mystery Disc.*

Box Three. *Waka/Jawaka; The Grand Wazoo; Over-Nite Sensation; Apostrophe; Roxy & Elsewhere; One Size Fits All; Bongo Fury; Zoot Allures.* Z

ON VIDEO

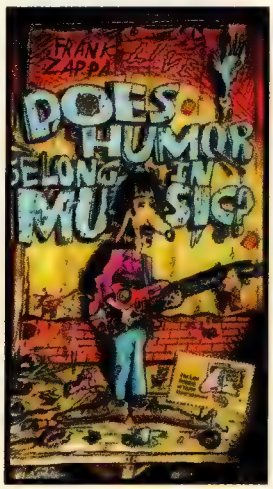
WALEED ALI

"I CAN'T FIGURE OUT IF FRANK WAS born too early or too late," says Waleed Ali, founder and president of MPI, distributor of Zappa's Honker Home Video. "Maybe he would be appreciated more if he had lived in the Renaissance or sometime far in the future. I don't know — he just seems so totally misunderstood today."

No stranger to adversity or controversy, Ali is a wildly independent distributor of non-Hollywood-originated material. His catalog of 2,500 titles includes the films of the Beatles as well as darker subjects such as the critically acclaimed movie *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, which Ali produced himself. MPI's goal is to provide quality programming that would never make its way out of the Hollywood establishment or into normal distribution channels. He and Zappa, of course, clicked right away.

Born in Chicago, Ali lived for a decade in the Palestinian village to which his father moved the family, fearful that the children would be spoiled by America's bounty. Nonetheless, Ali returned to the U.S. on his own at 15, and has worked for himself ever since. He and Zappa share a number of traits: the ability to work endless hours at a sitting, a strong sense of ethics and morality, and a willingness to fight for their beliefs. After Operation Desert Storm, Ali and his brother managed to raise nearly $300,000 for the refugees driven by war into ill-equipped camps. Over the seven-plus years of their relationship, he and Zappa have worked with a handshake-only agreement. "It drives my accountants and lawyers crazy," Ali states. "But Frank is the most honorable person I know. We've never had a problem." Z

BABY SNAKES 180:00



DOES HUMOR BELONG IN MUSIC? 57:00

UNCLE MEAT 120:00

THE AMAZING MR. BICKFORD 52:00

THE TRUE STORY OF 200 MOTELS 60:00

VIDEO FROM HELL 60:00

JOEL THOME

TRYING TO CONVERT PLANET EARTH WITH ZAPPA'S UNIVERSE

COMPOSER, CONDUCTOR, AND Zappa family friend, Joel Thome hopes to find a way to fine-tune *Zappa's Universe*, the 50th birthday tribute to Frank and turn it into a tour of the world. The event held in New York at The Ritz last November 7-10, brought Zappa veterans (Steve Vai, Dale Bozzio, etc.), classical virtuoso Lorin Hollander, '50s vocal stylists The Persuasions, and a symphonic grouping dubbed The Orchestra Of Our Time to packed houses of Zappa fans from the worlds of serious music and rock and roll. Cal Schenkel, designer of numerous Zappa album covers, provided the stage backdrop, a t-shirt, and an official program.

The logistics and finances of moving 50-60 musicians plus support staff in and out of 30-40 cities, however, remain to be worked out. No small chore, but one that Thome has gladly taken on due to his personal belief in the importance of *all* of Zappa's musical output — "serious" and "non-serious." Z

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

Beverly D'Angelo Her Lesson with the Real Master

BEVERLY D'ANGELO IS MUCH MORE *than a movie star, the mom in the* Vacation *movies, Patsy Cline in* Coal Miner's Daughter, *or whoever in three dozen other films. The Zappas call her a member of the family.*

Once Gail and I were in the comedy section of a video store, and there was *200 Motels*. On the box, they had this cartoon character drawing of Frank, and I thought, "Huh? This is like saying Leonardo DaVinci was a standup comic." As far as the media goes, it's just much easier to turn prophets into jesters. If they empowered him, they'd have a real threat on their hands. He's like an icon. When he announced that he was going to run for President, this local radio show asked listeners to call in if they'd vote for him, and like 85% of the thousand people who called in said yes. It's a very potent combination when someone is politically aware, is influential, and has a strong following, *and* will not let it be exploited.

This is not someone who lives in a vacuum. He is the most informed person that I know who's not in the political arena. He captures the imagination of everybody with whom he comes into contact. That is a very powerful position for an artist to be in, and if that artist has a strong political awareness, it's a potential threat. Period. Those aren't people who are rewarded in America at the moment. I think the responsibility of an artist is to lead people, through your particular gift, to the place that they cannot go by themselves. And he's done that over and over again. When you think of the number of ears that have been opened to him and the ears that are open to other composers—the range of his audience is fascinating.

I started out as a singer. It was my segue into acting, and there's a really weird thing that happened with me and the old opera singing. I was like a bar singer, and I had wrecked my vocal cords when I was singing with [Rockabilly] Ronnie Hawkins in Canada. I was really real hoarse, and had no range left, and Ronnie said, "There's this great teacher in Hamilton, Ontario, whose name is Ed Johnson. And so I went to study with Ed Johnson. When I walked into his room, he motioned to the librettos on the wall and said, "These will all remain mute unless people bring them to life." More than just learn about voice, all the elements of drama which Johnson introduced me to were very influential.

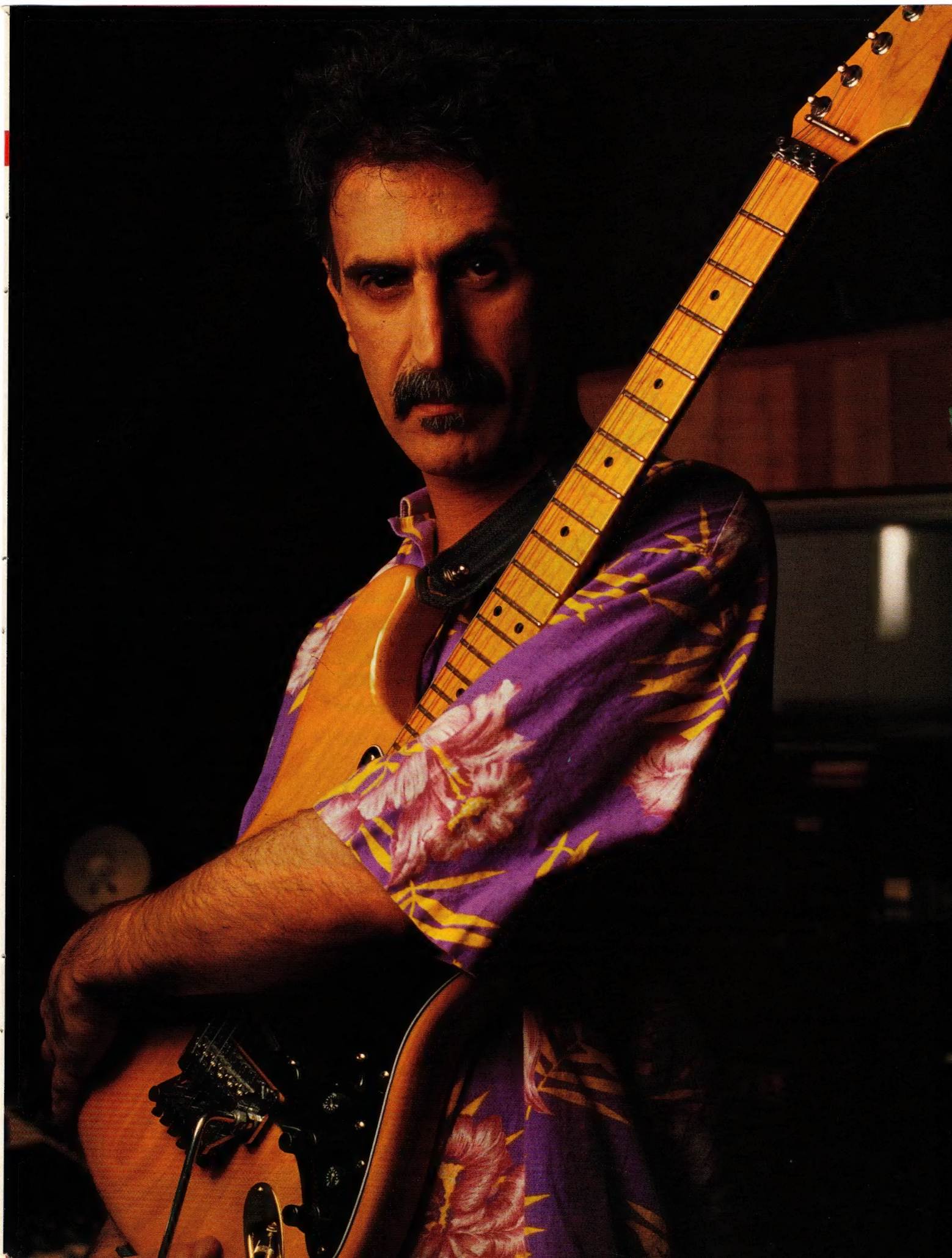
One day, Gail and I went over to see Nicolas Slonimsky, and when we went back to the Zappa house, Gail showed me a copy of Slonimsky's musicology encyclopedia. I looked up Ed Johnson, and it said all this stuff that I know about Ed, *i.e.* that he ran the Metropolitan Opera, that he originated many roles, that he was one of the greatest tenors of his time, and then it said *"Died, 1956."* I realized that this Ed Johnson with whom I had been studying was a complete fraud, a total fake! So I was sitting there in the kitchen, just as Frank came in. I told him all about this deception, and I said, "Oh my God, what am I going to *do*?" I was practically in tears. Frank said, "Did he teach you how to sing?" I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well then — so?"

What a turning point for me. His perspective has leveled me many times. Z

LEFT. HALF OF BEVERLY. "AS FAR AS THE MEDIA GOES, IT'S EASIER TO TURN PROPHETS INTO JESTERS."

RIGHT. ALL OF FRANK, CIRCA 1987.

PHOTO: ANN SUMMA



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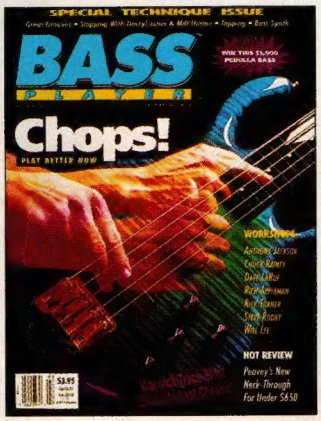

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